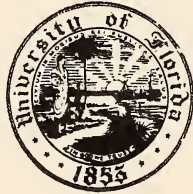




**THE BEST
POETIC WORK**
*of
Cale Young Rice*



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The Best Poetic Work

of

CALE YOUNG RICE

CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY PRESS

LEBANON, TENNESSEE

1943

BOOKS BY CALE YOUNG RICE

From Dusk to Dusk
Mihrima and Other Poems
Shadowy Thresholds
Wraiths and Realities
Trails Sunward
Earth and New Earth
A Pilgrim's Scrip
A Sea-Lover's Scrip
Songs to A.H.R.
Stygian Freight
Love and Lord Byron
Seed of the Moon
High Perils
Far Quests
At the World's Heart
Porzia
A Night in Avignon
Sea Poems
Many Gods
Song Surf
Bitter Brew
Plays and Lyrics

IN PROSE

Youth's Way (A Novel)
Winners and Losers
(With Alice Hegan Rice)
Turn About Tales
(With Alice Hegan Rice)
A New Approach to Philosophy

EDITOR'S NOTE

Before his death last January my brother requested me as his literary executive to supervise the publication and distribution of this volume. As it is not a commercial venture, the edition will be limited to a few hundred copies.

Readers who are familiar with the contents of the twenty-two volumes comprising his poetry readily can visualize the hesitancies, the reluctancies, the spiritual agonies my brother must have undergone in making selection. I know he omitted many lyrics that he loved as a parent loves his child; many that discerning friends rated worthy of inclusion in any anthology. Evidently he preferred to play safe by including only what many critics generously had appraised rather than risk censure for including even a few of alleged mediocre quality.

In conclusion, since this definitive edition contains innumerable revisions and much that is new, I call insistent attention to that portion of the FOREWORD which relates to the romantic dramas and one-act plays. Any critical evaluation—particularly of the dramas—based on the earlier versions would lack finality—perhaps perpetrate an injustice.

LABAN LACY RICE.

Cumberland University
Lebanon, Tennessee
October, 1943

FOREWORD

In making the selections for this volume I am aware that many poems especially liked by others have been omitted. To this I can only reply regretfully by stating the principles which have determined my choice. They are: a consensus of the judgment of critics whose opinion I most value; a long study of ultimate poetic values; a wide experience in public and private readings; finally, a sense of the quality of poetic "inspiration" felt at the moment of creation.

That the narrative poems "Dallow's Bluff," "Apaukee, The Half Breed," and "Life Goes On," are rightly chosen from a number of others I cannot doubt. The reception given them by reviewers both here and in England would alone compel their inclusion had not my own judgment done so. In writing them my desire was that their American content should be set to a rhythm more pulsingly free than that of traditional blank verse, yet avoiding the unlyrical prosiness which has too often characterized much of our recent free verse.

The three longer dramas, "Yolanda Of Cyprus," "David," and "Charles di Tocca," have been finally revised for this volume, so are to be judged here only. Their materials, unlike those of the narratives, are not of today's America, but of the romantic past. Were that not so, however, I would admit to a belief that romantic-realism, the creed under which they were written, seems to be indispensable to poetic drama. For realism unquestionably demands prose, and classicism less poetic intensity and glamour of materials than such drama requires. That their speech should be natural, however imaginatively poetic, and their development of character and action organic, was therefore especially what I sought. "A Night In Avignon," "Giorgione," and "Arduin," the three one-act plays included, were written under the same creed.

In choosing the lyrics, written over a period of many years, no creed or ism, Americanism included, has limited my choice. Having travelled much in other lands and seen humanity at its tasks and devotions, I have merely written of the world as I have seen it, and with whatever technique seemed suitable and free. The kind of nationalism which would limit a poet to his own country in choosing his materials still seems to me peculiarly narrow. For of all writers the poet, with wings already overweighted by modern

materialism, should especially refuse to submit to such isolationism, as a full half of the greater poetic achievements of the English language will testify. In the new world order ahead he must more than ever be able to strike the universally human rather than the merely national note of yesterday.

The more widely known of these lyrics have not been placed together but are distributed throughout the volume according to mood and subject. The poems dealing with the present World War, as with the First, are to be found at the end of the volume. A number of new and hitherto unpublished poems have also been included.

CALE YOUNG RICE.

Louisville, Ky.

TO ALICE HEGAN RICE

During the year before you died your chief desire was to see this volume published. That desire failed of fulfilment, despite my efforts. Now I can only say "here it is," though believing the words come forever too late.

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DALLOW'S BLUFF

I

An autumn pall of heat hung sultrily over
The thousand-rivered flow of the Mississippi,
And over the wooded hill-banks of oak and cypress,
The day the Steamer Belle exploded and caught fire,
Just as her bow, swan-beautiful, swung around
The point of Dallow's Bend to Dallow's Landing.
The fiery blast that tore her iron entrails out
Was a sharp bright relief for a livid moment
To eyes that watched her there against the twilight—
As if lightning and thunder had cracked the autumn drouth.
Then horror filled all hearts as crying calamity
Cluttered the bloody water, arms and faces struggling
Amid eddies of debris that went under
To come up free of wild hands that had seized it.
Twenty oars put out among the living
Who drifted past clinging to larger wreckage
Of deck and rail that chance had swirled by them;
And twenty put back laden with tragic freight.
But after the wounded had been tenderly lifted and borne
To homes where gentle sympathy and pitying skill
Would salve their pain, Una Dallow, who had beheld all
And hurried down to the levee from the old house
Of the Dallows on Dallow's Bluff, heard a voice asking,
Behind shadowy piles of baled cotton
Destined to cities with strange singing names:
"Who from Dallow's was lost upon her, any one?"
And the answer man-toned and man-indifferent,
"Only the whore, Lily Clay; drowned, I reckon.
Hadn't been here for twenty years, they say."

II

A word begins a new world for the young
Or sends a sick sense of the old's vileness
So sharply through them sometimes that life seems
But a breeding-place of dark inherited evils.

The flush of shame that burned the body of Una Dallow
As she heard that stript syllable whose nakedness
She had only looked at on the Bible's pages
Shrinkingly and as if at her own flesh,
Angered her as a desecrating hand might.
She took her way home through the tepid twilight
That flitting bats shuttled across jaggedly
To the old house's pillared porch, upon which stood
Her father, Julian Dallow, leaning jaundiced
And fretful against a pillar. A drug addict,
So set apart by soul-gulfs from all around him,
He haunted the place querulously between withdrawals
To the opiate rites that secretly enslaved him.
Complaint was all that was left him of authority;
So now to Una mounting the steps he quavered weakly,
"You shouldn't be out so late, Una, it's past dark;
You could have seen enough here, from the Bluff.
Your mother must have known something was going to happen;
She has lain all day in one of her spells of premonition
Unable to speak . . . Who from Dallow's was lost?"
Una thought, "It sickens me when he asks that way
With his morphia-mind; he doesn't care." But she answered him:
"A woman," and then quietly hurried past him
Through the tall door's dark shadow and up to her chamber.
She had wanted to add bitterly, turning there,
"The whore, Lily Clay!" making a lash of the words
To cut him with, but her tongue stalled in shame,
And she only whipped the door to sharply behind her.
Undoing her hair she shook its glinting darkness out
As if to rid herself of the fever under it.
At eight, Stephen Archer—son of a gambling father
Who flouted the boy's passion for books and music
As a reproach to his own law-contemptuous youth
Of dice and dissipation—was coming to see her.
Intending betrothal to him, Una had chosen a gown
Of dream-thin whiteness, which in the hushed moonlight
Of the willow arbor where their love had come to bloom
Would swathe her body as softly and alluringly
As night-mist a hill-breast in spring.

Instead she took a black lace and slipped into it,
Feeling the threads net over her soft flesh
With a little shudder as if they were tangling her life,
Yet glancing around at her mirror saw her bosom under it
So beautifully rounded that a blush of triumph
Swept through her in a voluptuous wave—until she remembered
Her invalid mother stretched there in the next room,
A victim to that strange trance of speechlessness
Whenever time was about to give black birth
To some misfortune: and who now was suffering maybe
The mute pains that followed it. Going in to her,
Lying so on a canopied bed, ghost-frail,
In catafalque-like pallor, Una, driven by thoughts
That quickly forgot pity, because begotten
By new and troubling presciences, turbidly asked:
"Mother, is the trance over yet? . . . are you better? . . .
Why are you still speechless, what is it makes you so
When such things are going to happen? . . . Listen, Mother,
Did you have a vision, and see all that would happen in it,
Everything as it was? . . . Did the trance show you
A woman drowning, a bad woman, Lily Clay? . . .
What was she like, Mother? . . . did she have hair
As dark as mine? Was she as tall and slender? . . .
Did you ever fear, Mother, when you were young and lovely
To look at your own body when thinking of *her* sort? . . .
A man down on the levee said, 'The whore, Lily Clay,
Was drowned,' and I shuddered as if my own limbs
Were rolling out there under the sandy current."
As only rippling shudders slipped serpent-swift
Down the white form under this flood of questioning,
And as the tranced eye-lids did not flutter,
Una turned away, her thoughts circling back
From flighty rangings around the drowned woman
To her expected lover. Firmly down the stairs
She went, feeling spent and suddenly hungry.
Julian Dallow sat at the glossy table,
A sallow spirit dulling the palate like a nausea.
Never hungry, for morphia fed his flesh falsely,
Yet never forgetting that food once had excited him,

He tasted and complained, his mind moving
Morbidly over the day's unsated cravings
Like a weak soul in a fleshless purgatory
Remembering flesh. Now he was prompted evilly
Back to the question Una had only half answered
And said aggrieved, "You didn't tell me, Una,
The name of the drowned woman, the one from Dallow's;
Was it anybody we knew?" At which Una felt
The health of her young body push as never before
Away from the decay and fetid caviling of him.
But she checked herself with remorse, thinking, "It's no use;
Whatever he is he is now in spite of himself.
God *could* prevent such wrecks and won't—or He cannot:
Those are the two stones of the mill between which
They are ground . . . it doesn't matter which does the grinding."
Patiently then and evenly she answered him,
"The woman was Lily Clay, Father, a prostitute."
Then found herself suddenly spurred to add scornfully,
As if the drowned woman had seized her lips,
"But what of the men whose lust made one of her!"
Words that had strong talon and beak, it seemed,
To tear the heart of Julian from its torpor,
For knife and fork clattered out of his hands—
Causing the four candle flames on the white linen
To shake, then stand tall and still as awed spirits.
Una seeing his mouth fall open strickenly
Surmised at once, "So he too knew her bed!"
And then, for more than this was needed to make clear
The thought racking him, asked herself, "But why should she
After so long a time raise such ghosts in him,
And why does he seem now so furtively eager
To push them back in the grave before I see them?"
But rising she only said, "Stephen is coming.
He wants me to marry him, and I may . . . I don't know.
Nothing seems decent. Send him out to the arbor, please,
I'll wait for him there. The air here is stifling."
And turning without a look she left the huddled shape
Twitching there in the candle-light speechlessly.

III

September takes her dead leaves lightly ever,
They drop in the moonlight with no sound of death;
Nor did Una, though her bosom swelled troubledly
Toward the globed moon as the tide does,
Trample them with a sense of summer gone.
Dark, except for silver thwarts the moon-rays
Were thrusting over, the river flowed invisibly.
But staring to where the dim current lost itself
In shadow that only imagining could solve,
Una asked, in the arbor overhanging the Bluff,
"Where is she now, that poor drowned woman, Lily Clay?"
And again over her body seemed to feel
The sandy flow of the Great Father of Waters
Rushing below to the Gulf. And when, after a space,
She heard the hurried steps of her lover coming behind her,
She did not move. "Una," Stephen Archer's lips
Breathed on her hand, that fluttered like a timid bird
In his as he dropped down beside her and caught its whiteness,
"Why have you come out here? The river tonight
Will cast a spell of sadness over the promise
I know you mean to give me. Yet, beloved,
Even the pitiful death-cry of the drowning,
When the blast tore the twilight, hardly reached me,
Because my heart, shut all day in a dream, was saying,
Tonight Una will twine my life with love.
But Una, drawing her hand away from passion that seemed
Only to root deeper dreads and doubts in her,
Said, "Wait, Stephen, and don't kiss me . . . not yet.
I fear there is more trouble; my mother has lain
In a trance that has often proved to be of omen.
And Stephen—my father knew the drowned woman out there.
You heard her name, Lily Clay? You know about her?
Stephen, are that kind different—are they so different
To other women? . . . No, don't answer me if you have ever . . ."
"I haven't, Una, I haven't," Stephen broke in
As a wind-breath lifted the arbor's willow leaves
And blew a stray wisp of cloud from the moon's face.

"But, Una, it's strange: my father knew the woman too.
He thinks I'm a degenerate, a mere art-weakling,
Because I keep no mistress, and derides me for it,
Especially since my mother's death. Tonight at supper
Hearing of Lily Clay he said, 'The Lily, eh?'
Then, looking at me with memories of lust in his eyes,
'A damn fine piece of flesh before she slipped too far
And took the town's trade down in New Orleans.
You might have been her son; I had a brat by her,
Or so she swore, before she left Dallow's
In—what year was it, nineteen one?' . . . Una, I wonder . . ."
But Una had risen. A gnawing intimation in her
Had stirred and now was beginning to say to her,
"So; his father too? . . . before she went away!"
And then, numbly, "They *do* have children, her sort?"
After which it began to stumble on doubts and fears,
Like poison weeds growing up darkly in her, and whisper,
"There's something I cannot see. What is it? what is it?
It frightens me . . . I mustn't let Stephen touch me,
He mustn't touch me, nobody must touch me
Ever, ever, unless . . . When did his father say
She left Dallow's, the drowned woman, Lily Clay?
I'm twenty-one and this is . . . Stephen," she stammered, aloud,
As if this swarm of fears were violating her,
And pushing her arms out against the night-heat
Whose clasp, even, seemed to be loathsome to her,
"Stephen, we can't marry. You must go away.
And go now, won't you? I told you the Dallow blood
Had madness in it and seeds of misery
Ready to spring up always . . . O my dear, my dear,
I mustn't see you again . . . I love you too much.
And something tells me I shouldn't. We mustn't meet again."
At which Stephen, hurt, cried, "Go away?"
The universe seemed to have struck him without hands.
But Una, trembling: "I can't say why, I don't know.
I don't, I don't . . . There isn't a reason—a clear one,
Or if there is it would be cruel to seek it,
To pry into it . . . Stephen, do you suppose
They'll ever find her body . . . the drowned woman's?"

O Stephen, if they do I must see it."—"Una," he answered,
And spoke as if a fatal undertow of evil
Were sweeping her out and drawing her away from him,
"You have seen too much and heard too much already today:
The only madness now, would be to leave you.
My father's soul is cards and dice, and your father's
Is morphia-rotted; but that is nothing to us.
Why should we wait longer? Let us marry at once
Before another day like this shall come to breed
Futile reasons against it. Una, I need you,
The great thoughts and the great songs of men
With you to share them will make a world for me,
A world fit to live in. Your mother's habit
Of trance and premonition is but a disease:
I won't let you contract it." But Una was saying
Through his importunity as through a strong wind,
"No, Stephen, no . . . No, you must go away.
I don't know why. I know you must. Don't kiss me: go"—
Until his arms fell slowly from around her, offended,
And left her standing free. Then as if
That undertow utterly swept her backward from him
She dimly swayed out of the arbor's door,
While overhead the dark watery sighing
Of willow boughs in the wind washed over the roof eaves.

IV

Up in her chamber Una sank by the window.
Her shaken heart seemed to be sending spasms of pain
Out of her body into impassive space.
Leaves fell, but as if apathetic of death,
So long had they been dying. Within the house
Were the two her questions gathered around; for fancies
Drowned long in her underself came floating up now
With black swollen meanings. She felt through the walls
The tranced woman she called mother in the tall bed
In the next room, and down below between shelved books
That other she called father, preparing narcotic rites
With the small crystal cylinder whose piston would drive
A few drugged hours of peace into his veins.
She sat long, then heard herself say to herself,

Though neither seemed herself any longer, but only two dreads
Of what she might find herself to be, "He'll lie:
Morphia makes him: but I must learn what years
Lily Clay was his mistress. Something will tell me.
I'll go and learn whose daughter I am, whatever he says."
She went down the unlighted stairs; and her stark face
Might well have told another than Julian Dallow
That an old sin may become a new fate
After it has been dust in the heart twenty years.
A light streamed out into the hall from the lone room
Where the habit-wreck sat, waiting for soft stupor
To swathe in quietness his raw nerve-edges.
He barely stared. Lily Clay was forgotten doubtless
And the stricken memory of her he had betrayed.
"Stephen has gone," Una began, "I didn't promise
To marry him." Then she paused for his gaze to become
Sight of her, not that hazed narcotic glimmer.
"He told me—things of his father." The words crawled,
As she could see, very slowly into his brain,
Worm-slowly until they found him. Then he answered,
"It's always so: Dallows and Archers never marry.
The breeds have always stood apart, hating each other,
Except you and this one. Have you told your mother?
It may be she had premonition of this too.
You never know; she won't say anything afterwards.
She leant to Stephen . . . But young girls do as they like now:
Their parents are nobody." His melancholy
Hung on the air morbidly after his voice stopped.
But Una had not heard his lean complaining,
Her mind was a fire burning on toward a dread
Invisible and yet unnamed before her.
"He told Stephen the drowned woman, Lily Clay,
Was *his* mistress also," she said mordantly,
And her eyes lit like hawks upon the cadaverous face,
To gather the full meaning of the startled change
And angry terror that shot through it.
"He lies, then,"
The thin twitching lips cried; then added tortuously,
"A daughter shouldn't be talking about such things

With a father. Lily Clay wasn't bad then."
Una looking beyond him through the open window
At the still trees knew that his words were no more
Than dead leaves falling,—sap of faith was not in them.
She went on, though dread sucked with ceaseless lips
At the inmost sources of peace still left in her:
"He told Stephen he had a child by her
Before she left Dallow's—many years ago."
Her words were sheathed in steel and they went through him
As swords through a ghost—he being hardly more
Than a ghost confined to a corpse and facing torture
Of things supposedly forgotten beyond all hate or fear.
He stiffened and then crumpled, but a dry whisper
Crackled out of his lips: "He never had her.
Nobody had her; nobody had her but me then;
And least of all that money-fingered Archer."
Una looking out past him again for a space
And past the moon-gray trees to the darkened river,
Was driven by his faltering to a deeper dread
That dread had hidden from her: she said firmly,
"The child, then, was *your* child, and not another's?
You are my father? Stephen is not blood-brother to me?"
His large-pupiled eyes met hers like caged things
Cowering in their sockets. The hands fluttered
And then by habit remembered the small cylinder
That had so often saved him from devouring terror.
He felt for it in his pocket and held fast to it.
"I didn't say," he whined hard from the cage he crouched in,
"There was a child. I didn't say it." But Una, paler:
"Am *I* that child? The drowned woman was *my* mother?"
His whine became a snarl, for her eyes lit on him
Again with haunted need of plucking the truth out:
"Yes; she was. I don't care now if you do know it.
There *was* another child, born the day you were,
Up stairs. It lies unnamed in Dallow Graveyard.
Its mother up there took *you* instead, without question,
And gave you the place that would have been her own baby's.
Now you have all. Lily Clay didn't want you."

Una swayed. The sudden polluting certainty
Had come, to taint every cell and fibre of her.
The fire in her veins turned to fever. She went to the window.
Lily Clay was out there drifting—or maybe her throat
Was caught in the fork of a dead snag and held horribly
As now her own seemed to be on a prong of pity.
Hot hysteria flooded up to her lips
Then hotter tears to her eyes. With fierce loathing she turned,
And “Oh, you beast! Oh!” she cried tossing her hands
And almost ready to strike the ghastly face there;
But instead she dashed the tears from her eyes wildly
With upward strokes and staggered out of the room
And out of the house, weeping, moaning, and crying, “Oh!”
She was not aware, hurried along, where she was going,
Until, set on a knoll beside the road, she saw
The moon-misted house of the Archers with one window
Watchfully lit below; then like a moth she knew
She must flutter to it and finish the night’s misery.
She did not knock but entered straight, appearing wildly
In the door-glow like a wraith of retribution.
The father of Stephen Archer with suave fingers
Was laying card-offerings down, knaves and kings and queens,
To his gods of chance on the green baize before him.
To Stephen pale across the room he was saying,
“If she was Dallow’s mistress too, she tricked me,
And got good pennies for it. As for you and the girl—”
He saw Una and stopped half ready to fancy
His words by some diablery had conjured her up.
But Una brushing the dark shade of her hair back
From her wet, stained cheeks, hardly beheld him.
“Stephen,” she said, “Whatever has happened or shall,
Will you want to marry me when I tell you I am the daughter
Of Lily Clay, the prostitute, who drowned today?”
Father and son stared at her, and then the elder
Swallowing down a startled lump, that seemed to fall
Leaden upon his heart, exclaimed, “By God, it’s true.
The same eyes and brow and mouth; the same body.”
But Stephen only let her name fall from him

With dazed motionless anguish; until, more pitiful:
"I am Lily Clay's daughter," she said, "Does it matter to you?
Would you marry me now? Would any man want to marry me?"
Again she brushed the fallen shade of her hair back,
Wildly confused, and waited, until he faltered out,
"Una, you know I've loved you. What is the matter?"
Una shrank back seeing her image wither swiftly
In his heart as a flower under polluted air.
A cold trembling gripped her. "It's just as well," she said;
"It couldn't have been, for I don't know who my father was.
I only know that men make ruins of women
And outcasts of the daughters they have had by them:
And so it seems that love is the one desecration
That cannot be forgiven; and now I loathe my flesh
For ever having felt love . . . Oh, my poor mother!"
A storm of tears, a strong heave of hysteria
Broke from her after her words' lightning and drove her out
Of the room and out of doors again into the night.
A cloud risen out of the west had wrecked the moon
And sunk it; the wind, too, with invisible flail
Was threshing dead leaves from the limbs; they fell about her.
Blinded by tears and by the wind and the blowing darkness
She stumbled along, missing the road and finding another
That led sheer to the Bluff's edge above the river.
She was moaning now, "I hate men, I hate men;
I'll go away where I shall never see another.
I'll take the veil. Love is loathsome, loathsome."
And not until, suddenly, she had stepped over
The Bluff's brink and fallen a space and struck the water
Did she know where she was or what had happened to her.
The cold current chilled and strangled her speech back
As with vain hands untaught to swim she beat it;
But when again the flow caught and swept her downward,
She thought, "It is my mother's hands dragging me under."
And then in the ringing of her ears heard all the sins
Of desire her heart had ever secretly listened to—
Following the bitter shame of which came darkness.

V

At Dallow House, the tranced woman awoke then
 And called weakly. Julian Dallow prowling lean
 And sleepless from room to porch, from porch to hall, heard her
 And went to her chamber. "Where is Una?" she asked.
 "Out somewhere," he answered her eyes, that did not move
 From the pale fixed stare upward. "She came and told me
 She doesn't mean to marry young Archer after all."
 The fixed still stare grew stiller as if the canopy
 Were a death-crystal into which they were gazing deeply.
 "No," she said, "No; she will not marry him—
 Not him nor anybody; and it is better so."
 She said no more. He went away. The river swept on . . .
 And time swept on and Dallow's Landing forgot.

AN ANCIENT FEUD

The young rack the old,
 The old rack the young,
 The one with a wild heart,
 The other with a tongue,
 The one with desire,
 The other with distaste,
 'Til each finds life
 But a bitterness, a waste.

The young see joy,
 And crave but its breath.
 The old see tears—
 And the end of them—death.
 The young cry "We're going!"
 The old, "You shall stay!"
 And no goal is worth while,
After the fray.

The young want tomorrow,
 The old, days before.

The young spend and borrow,
The old slave and store.
Ever they wrangle thus,
Hostile, apart,
One all too wise of head,
One too rash of heart.

Not a generation
Is free of the fret;
For one can't remember,
And one can't forget.
So, the same folly,
With naught to disabuse
One of thinking all's to gain,
One all to lose.

HIS WIDOW

The wreaths shrivelled and froze upon his grave.
She sat before the fire and warmed her knees
And yawned with relief and thought how black would please
The white of her skin; then softly trilled a stave
Of the new popular air, "Life Isn't So Bad!"

A horrid day for a funeral! . . . But grief
Had certainly been becoming to her; and she
Had raised her veil at the prettiest time to see
Eyes bent upon her—men's eyes—ardent if brief.
She would be wealthy too . . . "Life isn't so bad."

She must reduce her hips though: and be brave
And sad: a second husband likes to take
A widow's weeds off—for a great new love's sake.
She knew just how she would let him—sweet and grave.
He should be very proud . . . "Life isn't so bad."

She brushed her hair and tended to her nails,
And ate a chocolate cream: the wreaths were freezing . . .
She cried a little; two or three tears come squeezing;
But told herself that true strength never fails
The deepest hearts, and ceased . . . "Life isn't so bad."

She went to bed. Her head upon the pillow
Would have looked very lovely, she was sure,
Had there been any to see. . . . A year to endure!
She sighed, and felt as sad as wind in a willow,
And slept—and snored a little . . . Life isn't so bad.

A NUN, AT SEA

Mother of God, they are sending me to Rome,
Where our Saint's to be canonized,
But the sea is a terrible thing!
I walk the deck, telling my beads, all day.
The tides flow under my feet and I fear the way.
To say an *Ave* in high St. Peter's dome
Was all my desire in the cell I kept at home.
But now my desires are many, and wild as foam.
The sea is a terrible thing!
I am troubled by so much freedom, so much space.
Too scantily clad, young girls go fluttering by.
I drop my glance, but . . . with a wistful sigh.
The sea is a terrible thing!
Immodesty shuns our convent veil at home;
We robe and unrobe ourselves always in the dark.
Yet here—on a very pilgrimage to Rome—
I covet a beauty that every eye would mark!
A beauty that once I had; for, it is so;
Young men once gazed as ardently on me.
My limbs were lithe as the swift limbs of a doe.
The sea is a terrible thing!
My lips found other lips as fond to meet,
Not litanies, only litanies to repeat.

Mother of God, such love was bliss, complete.
The sea is a terrible thing!
Tonight they will dance on deck, to tempting strains.
The moon will be full; bosoms will rise and fall
With tides of the heart—warm passion-tides whose pains
Are sweeter to youth than the joys of Heaven, all!
The moon will be full. *The sea is a terrible thing!*
Lone below I shall lie and racked recall
How a young man looked with pity today on me
Then at a young girl's lips—then at the sea . . .
The sea is a terrible thing!
Would I were safe at home, safe in my cell
From these wild wicked thoughts. A crucifix
Is better for souls than body-dreams that mix
With mad delights in the heart—and so enspell.
Would I were there, content with robe and hood,
And a rosary for my only ornament,
Not here, thinking that life's few days were meant
For more than tending a holy chapel bell.
Mother of God, protect my wandering.
The sea is a terrible thing!

BENNY THE BEGGAR

Old Benny the beggar, pocked, ragged and blind,
With toes cropping out of his barn-like shoes,
As if to find pennies nobody will lose,
Stands rank on the corner of Gay Street.
He owns a guitar, slung 'round his neck,
Scratched with strumming and dead of tone,
And he tunes its strings to a mouth-saxophone
He slavers old airs into;
Old rags of song he has picked by ear
From the music-dumps of many a year,
From heart-stuff made by the music trade,
For the shallow moods of the many.
And he plays the faster, whenever a hand

Drops coins in the cup he wears.
 For he cannot see how the givers flee
 From the tainted sight and sound of him,
 As if from what *they* might have been
 Had his, or his sire's, been *their* sires' sin;
 And he lives to turn over his gains to a wench
 Who keeps him from thinking life's but a stench
 In the blind sewer of his days;
 A slut who pities him 'twixt the whiles
 She pays her way with *more* than smiles—
 Nor lets him know she cuckolds him;
 But hears him talk and dream by night
 Of things more wonderful far than sight:
 Of a little house at the foot of a hill
 And children and birds and a shady rill,
 And the new songs he'll twang there.
 So every morning in rain or sun,
 In June or winter, he taps his way
 To Gay Street corner—and sickens the day
 For Charity passing by . . .
 Which will not matter if, ere he dies,
 He does not learn that his hussy lies.
 For if he does, he'll choke her, I think,
 And tear from her wanton flesh
 Its gaudy jewels and harlot things—
 And hang himself in her corset strings.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Silence. Shadows. A little wind in the elms
 Under a window, a little wind passing.
 A sick-bed light burning low in a corner.
 An old woman with wry lips whimpering
 To a young girl,—who wakes and answers her,
 "What is it, mother?"
 "You must bury me—"

"Do not begin that again, mother. Why
Torture yourself with it—and torture me?"

"You think that death is nothing—being far from it.

"You can't look into the dark of the grave and see there

What I see; so you say it doesn't matter,

That nothing matters after we are dead—

As if our bodies were only—"

"Go to sleep, dear."

"... It is the first hours lying there

Under the heavy weight of earth I dread,

Not what comes after, though it be the Judgment.

For God won't follow, Shylock-like, I reckon,

Into the grave to have His pound of faith

From one who never has owed Him anything

But misery and black misfortune maybe."

"He won't, dear; so do go to sleep. Tomorrow—"

"... It is the first hours lying there . . .

So what I ask of you is that you bury me

At early morning; afternoon's too late:

I must have time to get used to the earth,

Before night comes—with terrible lonely stars—

And used to the dead around me. And by day

It will be easier than under darkness.

I am an old woman: you must promise it."

"I promise, mother; but—"

"You don't! . . . You don't care.

You have no pity. You think I am only weak—

And crazy maybe; weak and facing God—

You who believe in Him; weak and whimpering

For a few hours more of useless daylight. . . .

The young are hard—cold and hard and cruel."

"Mother, dear!"

"They are too happy and heedless

To understand. They have not died ten years

Before they die, to know what the grave is.

Or they believe that death is beautiful,

And see themselves lying pale and still there,

Like stone statues—while over them is weeping

A world that all too late has learned their worth.

The young can never understand, never,
 That in the end old veins may grow so chill
 As to care only to be spared at last
 The terror, maybe, of a leaking coffin."
 "The soul and not the body should concern us
 At times like this, mother."

"And who can ever know
 When the soul leaves the body? We may lie there
 And watch the living over us forget us,
 Even while they are laying flowers upon us."
 "Mother! Mother!"

"Shake my pillow up then.
 Nobody cares whether the old lie easy
 In the grave or out of it."

"There, now;
 Your pillow *was* hard. Have you cover enough?"
 "No cover will warm the old. Nothing will."
 "Goodnight. . . ."

"There's nothing good in any night."
 Silence again and shadows. The wind passing
 To other doors—and other, and other, and other.

SCURRUB

He died at his fingers first, and his toes;
 He said, "They are numb, they are numb!"
 But his bitter old heart and bitter old brain
 Beat on like a lashed tom-tom.
 His bitter old heart beat slanderously,
 His bitter old brain beat mad:
 Death reached as far as his ankle and knee—
 But he swore that the good are bad.
 Death reached as far as his knee and his thigh—
 But he swore that the true are false:
 He lived in a hell yet feared a Hell
 With a fear no fury halts.
 Death reached as far as his breast and throat,

But his tongue clapped on with might.
He hated all he had loved, and praised
All whom he had hated—in spite.
Death reached as far as his throat and lips,
That scurrile passions scored:
For a sneer at others' ugliness
Was a virtue he adored.
Death reached to his eyes—but his last look
Was a lunge at the universe.
His tongue sagged, and his heart stopped,
For better or for worse.
"There isn't a God," he often swore—
Which wouldn't have been so evil
Had his godlessness not quite convinced
The rest of us there is a Devil.

PITY OLD WOMEN

Pity old women who sit at windows
Nursing the wrong and rue of the years;
Munching the roots of bitter remembrance,
Washing the wry past down with tears.

Pity their worn and wrinkled faces,
Hands that never could catch joy's wing,
Lips that sag, sullen with sorrow,
Or with hate and scandal's sting.

Pity their eyes that live on vengeance,
Dead between a stab and a stab;
Or their bosoms—passion's pillow
Once—now passionless and drab.

Pity them bitter against all wisdom,
Wise in all barbed bitterness,
Tortured ever, and ever torturing,
Loving—and loathing—pain and distress.

Pity them as they ply their grievance,
Now against children, now against friends,
Old gray women, all the world over,
Waiting at windows 'til life ends.

"RED-LIGHT LETTY"

What was I stealin' for, me a lady
Of the red lights, that all the swellest guys
Once paid a eagle for the person of?
What was I stealin' for, mister? My Gawd,
You askin' that, when any bare-kneed chit
As jazes with her young man at a road-house,
With no more silk and wool than sky between *them*,
Could tell you that her kind has well nigh put
My kind upon the bunk. . . . You askin' that?
My Gawd, you askin' that, who keep a cab'ret
For lounge lizards and *liaisons* and liquor—
A joint where any pair as hasn't a parlor
With closin' doors can cuddle up for "tea" in?
I swear I wouldn't 'a'thought it! No, not even
Of any blind mouth-organ nickel-beggar
On a street corner . . . and much less of you,
Who caters to the younger generation—
Though what I say of *them* is they're as old
As Hell, and wiser too than they are old—
For haven't they put the skids upon their elders?
I say I wouldn't 'a'thought it . . . For who's goin'
To pay for such as me if these young misses
Dispense my specialty on every joy-ride?
It ain't fair, I say, it ain't fair!
The rich already has too much, and my kind
Takes to the trade mostly for the money—
Though *bein'* morons maybe, some of us,
And not fitten to *earn* the pinch of pleasure
That any daughter of Eve has got a right to!

I say it ain't fair for these rich misses
 And madames to give what our kind is paid for,
 And ruin the market. Let 'em get married—
 Not cut in on the joy-for-cash business
 That we've invested body and soul in. . . .
 Knowin' as men are goin' to have kisses
 Dear or cheap from now 'til Judgment Day.
 Gawd, I say, the younger generation!
 They'll have the whole world stealin', not just our kind,
 And not mere dirty dollars like *I* have,
 But true blue love—until none won't be left
 That's *more* than for an hour—and chastity
 Will be as short as skirts are in a ballet.
 Gawd, I say, the younger generation!
 Just wait 'til *they* have birdies to grow up
 And kick the family twigs from under *them*
 And go for flossy flights upon the loose!
 Just wait, mister, do! and then you'll see
 They'll wish they hadn't set my kind to stealin',
 As I'm wishin' I had a graveyard hole,
 Not this one you come shootin' questions into!

THE BURDEN BEARER

Bearing the sky on his back,
 Moon and star in its pack,
 Pain and trouble in his breast,
 When and where shall man find rest?

Shall infinity so weigh
 On his shoulders night and day,
 With no counter-thrust of God
 To sustain him, as a rod?

Must mortality so small
 Still bear all and doubt of all?
 God Himself has not such weight
 On Him as doubt of His fate.

APAUKEE, THE HALF BREED

Apaukee, the half-breed, rode on the edge of the Canyon.
His pony, a gray beast three years old, was swift and lean
As a coyote after months of winter roving.
The gut of the Canyon purged by the Colorado's muddy cathartic,
Which the Great Spirit had given a million years, without end,
Was dark now, and growing black faster; for the sunset
Was dulled behind a cloud-wall of red copper, fire-plumed,
Like the war-feathers of a Ute brave.

Apaukee felt but his Indian blood as the gray beast
Footed the trail back to the camp of his tribe, to the tall tepees
Of cross-poles and buffalo skins the Utes had coned yesterday
On a lower flank of the Great Gorge, pinyon-fringed.
Apaukee felt puma-bodied, lynx-eyed, and straight as the wind:
The thoughts and dreams of the white man, for two years damming
the flow
Of Indian freedom in him, while he went to the school at Boulder,
Were motes now in the distance, small as vultures that had swung
all day
Over the vast crack of the world he rode along.
Wild moods had purged him of his white father,
A stranger, never known to him, who had wed his mother,
A full-blood girl of the Utes betrayed by him,
Rather than suffer the stake's embrace and faggot's flame,
The tribe, painted with war-hate, had prepared for him.

The wind sang: purple shadow-cataracts fell
From tops of the mesas, down the ledging canyon-walls,
And lay in darker pools of awe and mystery there.
The wind sang, and caught a chant from Apaukee's lips

And blew the sounds apart and sent them swiftly dissyllabled
To nothingness and space. The little gray beast trembled,
And whinnied clear, as if her withers were joy-wrung,
But flexed herself as the trail began its screw descent
To the tepees by a small trickling canyon-spring where Apaukee
Had left three hours before his eight-months bride—

Apaukee deserted at birth by a white father,
As a red mother died in pain giving him breath.

A last swerve brought the sharp smoke of the camp-fire,
Cutting his nostrils. Wild meat was roasting.
The scent of it was a thousand years old to Apaukee
Who had made his choice to follow the fires of the red man
And empty whiteness out of him, palefacedness,
And the ways of the palefaces grasping and devious:
Moccasins, beaded hunting-shirt and eagle plumes,
These henceforth were to be his herital portion.

The wind sang. Apaukee thought of his bride,
Daughter of scarred Kutowaw, medicine-man, rain-maker,
And stronger with his tribe than dead Chief Uray who had seen
wisdom

In the point of the plow the white man digs the earth with.
For the Great Spirit, Uray said, is not the wind, not the thunder:
He is the Voice who speaks to the seed in the dark earth
And bids it shoot up harvest into the air,
Arrows of grain to slay the hosts of hunger and famine.
Apaukee thought of his eight-months bride, Wautona,
The one flower that had grown from the iron veins of Kutowaw,
And he sang in his heart expectantly:
"Moon-maid, Wautona, beader of love's garments
With turquoise and wampum; Wautona, willow-wand;
Wautona, weaver of peace into my blankets;
Builder of camp-fires for my weariness
After the hunting; finder of springs in the parched lands;
Your beauties are sent flying through my heart's height
As wild geese are sent on the skies to southward!"

So sang he. Then out of the pines to the trail's end
He came to sight of the camp by a rain-born streamlet,
But stopped . . . suddenly stricken by what he saw there.

For Fate had blown,
Fate the foulest wind from beyond space and time,
Fate that stinks of eternity and of grief and despair,

Fate, that made his heart a muscle-terror
And pressed Indian wildness from him and left only
Weak things that his white blood had taught him,
Tender things that had made Wautona more beautiful
Than a squaw should be to the eyes of any brave.
For Apaukee saw a bier beside his tepee,
Apaukee heard a child new-born crying
In the wrinkled arms of withered old Shushonee the oldest squaw
Who had ever given pap to a Ute since time was;
And by the squaw stood Kutowaw, motionless,
A red pillar, stronger than winds, and deep-scarred
By storms of medicine-making and demon-scourging.
Apaukee fell to the earth, his pony quivering.
The camp-fire licked a red tongue at the twilight
As if tasting the darkness of the spirit-land,
Where Apaukee knew that his bride Wautona had gone.
Apaukee rose as the dead rise and went to the bier,
Pale, with the stench of Fate choking his soul.
Kutowaw and the squatted braves awaited;
The new-born wail in Shushonee's arms waned to silence.
Apaukee paused at the bier, as if grief-craven.
The Red blood in him fought the gentler White
And blocked a torrent rush of tears behind his eyes:
They must not fall, his eyes must be stern granite:
A half-breed weeping over the death of his squaw
Would fold contempt in his blanket ever after, the scorn of every
Ute

Whose sires had won their women fiercely in war-raids.
The bloods fought in Apaukee and the White lost;
Though the battle would be again and yet again, he knew,
Across the burning fields of his flesh and his bone's marrow
'Til the ghost-trail should call his feet to Wautona.

Meanwhile Kutowaw spoke, thus smoulderingly:
"The ninth month was near for her, but not come.
The Great Spirit had only filled the moon's belly
With fire eight times . . . white-blood seed in Kutowaw's daughter
Was too weak to endure the full time of birthing.
So . . . too soon . . . she has borne a paleface,

A girl-child, crushed from the womb, no son:
Crushed forth by angry powers: for the Evil Spirit
Flung Wautona down, from the rock she sat on, weaving a song,
To child-birth and death." He ended stonily.
The words dragged Apaukee's eyes from the pine pier
To Kutowaw's beak-face. He knew, he knew now
What midwife had brought his child birth, his wife death,—
The rock on which he had wooed her to him had done it!
Perhaps Wautona had waited on its peak looking for him
When the Powers in it had brought the birth-pains that flung her
down.

He would have spoken, but the feast awaited.
And back of Kutowaw now the moon came walking
Between dark walls of the Canyon, ghost-footed,
As if she were Wautona seeking her child.
Apaukee looked at old Shushonee hushing the mite
And turned to the fire-circle where the braves smoked.
A young deer was the feast, flavored with wild rice and herb-ends . . .
Apaukee had called Wautona *his* young deer,
Slender of flank and swift to do his willing,
Though eight months had weighted her, waxing and waning.
Apaukee's throat became a thong that strangled the food back,
He could not eat of dead beauty by dead beauty.

"Give him the child," a young squaw, seeing, said to Shushonee,
Crooning low savage hush-songs by the teepee,
"The breath of his bride is in it." But old Shushonee maundered,
"A man child will make a man forget.
A girl child will fill his heart with remembrance."
And yet she tottered across the glow toward Apaukee,—
While the moon still like Wautona's spirit walked the Canyon,
While shadows stood around like dead braves shrouded,—
And would have handed the little flesh to the father of it,
Had not Kutowaw, suddenly rising, thrown a glance
Of cold between like a stone veil and stayed her, saying:
"Wa! woman, awa! The Indian way
And the way of the Utes is not the way of the white man.
The dead of the paleface go to the spirit-land
With no weapons, no food buried beside them.

Nor does the woman, dying of birth, take her child there:
It is left behind in the lodges.
But long enough has the white man's law compelled us."
He towered tall as a totem and his words towered;
They opened gulfs at the feet of thought, for had not
The old custom lapsed for years while Uray ruled,
The child-burial rite abhorred by the white man?
And now did Kutowaw, loving his daughter, though she had mated
A half-breed, mean to revive it despite the Law
Forbidding its use from Great Water to Great Water?
Apaukee stunned gazed upon Kutowaw
And did not take the little flesh in his arms' cradle.
But the bloods began their battle again within him,
The ghostly generations of the White,
Inheritors of a Child born in a Manger,
Against the primitive ages of the Red.

"Kutowaw," then at length he ventured, "is wiser maybe
Than the strong gods who give our land to the paleface,
Driving the Indian out from under the sky's lodge.
Kutowaw for the Utes has made much medicine:
He has sent the wind for the rain-cloud and brought it up,
He has made the rains plow the earth and give us harvests.
He has flung spells against fever, 'til there was body-coolness.
But the old burial ways—"

He did not say more,
For the new-born whimpered suddenly there on the bones
Of bosomless old Shushonee, whimpered weakly against
The darkness of the world it had sadly come to.
And in the whimper Apaukee heard another voice, Wautona's
speaking,
Wautona, his beloved; and suddenly out of his eyes,
Breaking the granite of his will, the tears gushed,
A torrent fearless of shame. Turning he flung himself
On the body of his dead squaw and called her name and her name
'Til the night-canyon ached with unseen wraiths of her.

Kutowaw heard, contemptuous, and spoke again,
As the soul of the fire sent sparks praying upward:

"The Utes will shrink no longer from the old way, disgrace is on us.
When dawn comes and the burial rites, Apaukee shall lay
The child in the mother's arms. On the long journey
Wautona shall have its lips to draw the pain from her breasts,
As her mother had and the tribe women before her."

But Apaukee springing up quickly,
The bloods in him warring fiercer—the white flow
With horror now against the red—cried, "Ute braves,
Wautona is the daughter of Kutowaw,
But a child left to the cold knife of the night-wind
Is a child murdered; many peoples have said it,
Peoples beyond the Great Waters east and west,
Many peoples mightier than the Utes are.
Wautona was the fire within my heart,
Wautona was the magic in my bow's strength.
Gone to the land of the spirit she is dearer to me.
But the cold weight of a murdered child upon her breast
Would cause her spirit returning to curse our camp-fires."

Then wraths worked across Kutowaw's warped face
As shuttles across tangled threads of a loom,
Though his voice came as cold as the north wind far-off:
"Apaukee has drunk poison talk at the white man's lodges,
But I have made medicine as your chiefs have
By secret wisdom old as the buttes and rivers.
The Indian gods are your gods. Let one of you take
The child from old Shushonee and lay it naked to die
On the rocks, that Wautona's spirit may not lack it
And turn revengeful back to waste our hunting."

A silence hung. Apaukee waited. The braves sat
Blanketed in the red ring of the camp-fire.
The moon was gone to her lodge beyond the Bad Lands,
The Great Spirit in starry wampum brooded impassively.
The River purged the Canyon down in the darkness.

"Awai!" a brave cried then, suddenly leaping war-like
From the red circle, "When were the Utes cowards?"

The child of a dead woman belongs to the woman;
Another who gives it pap steals from the dead,
And famine is the price the dead will exact for it.”
He wrenched the little pale one from Shushonee’s arms,
Where pitifully it nuzzled at her nipple,
And would have stripped it instantly of body-swathing,
To lay it out in the night wind on the cliff,
Had not Apaukee, swifter, seized it and flung the brave
Backward and turned and fled toward the night-dark
As if it were Wautona upon his bosom.

There was outcry, springing to feet and grasping of bows.
The only weapon the law of the Whites had left the Utes,
Then twenty arrows sang—Kutowaw’s loudest—
For the blood of the tribe’s traitor; and Kutowaw’s found him.
They brought Apaukee back, pierced as the child was by a flint head,
And the squaws laid the birthling on Wautona’s breast.
Then in the Council Kutowaw’s voice stood up and said:
“Who asks what shall be done with the flesh of Apaukee?
The deep canyon shall be his grave: and the white man
May find him and come questioning us: but not before
Our friends the vultures gnaw away the name of him.”

And so it was. And so the red dawn came
And poured new sacrificial blood on the earth’s altar.
Then Kutowaw, and the braves with him, bore Wautona,
The little halfpaleface on her heart like a death-bud,
Into the pines and scratched a shallow grave there
And chanted their rites and moaned their tribal wails
’Til the night came and stilled their tongues with stars.
But Apaukee’s grave was a rock-cleft so deep and dark
That the wings and beak of the vulture hovered vainly
And claws of the coyote could not defile it.

CRIES IN THE NIGHT

I walked in the pines. A coyote
On the brink of the canyon pointed a nose

At infinity filled with planets
 And washed by floods of the moon.
 He bayed his awe of the vastness,
 His harsh uneasy fear of the strangeness
 Of night stretching unknowably
 Out and beyond him forever.
 He shrank away to his hunting
 Or mating. And I, on the brink there,
 Faced, as he, the universe,
 And knew that his cry was my cry.

CARNIVAL

Earth is the merry-go-round of the Devil,
 Swung from his thumb with a mocking tune.
 Mount your hobby, a good or an evil,
 And ride, friend, in sun or moon.
 Straddle your art, trade, or profession;
 Ride to laughter, ride amid groans:
 For a brief hour you hold possession,
 Then you pay for it—with your bones.
 "All for Love" is the first tune played you;
 How you lean to it in your seat!
 "Gold Is Good, It Is Gold Has Made You"
 Is the next—it seems complete.
 "Power Is the Goal the Gods Covet"
 Sounds then, and you spur your speed.
 "Art Is Life—or the Best of It"
 Breaks in and you chant the creed.
*Earth is the merry-go-round of the Devil,
 Mount your hobby—and pay the price;
 Choose the tune, a good or an evil,
 And ride, friend, for none rides twice.*

BRAVADO

When I am put to bed by death
 And tucked in by the grave-digger

Under a blanket of red clay,
As big as I or a little bigger,
I shall find the means to walk—
If means are—through rocks and rivers,
And listening to the atoms talk
Cull some wisdom from their quivers.
I shall ply the mole with queries,
Ask of the blind earth-worm the way.
From queer bony fossil-series
Learn if life has gone astray.
Learn if up is better than down,
If ascent has any meaning;
If the ant-hill or the town
Is the aim toward which Time's leaning.
I shall have great whiles as spirit,
If I'm that; if not as dust,
Which at least has *this* merit:
Senselessness to any thrust.

SERFS

Winter has planted the fields black with crows.
In frustrate flocks they cark and scream and caw,
Plucking at furrow and frozen hill breast
For sustenance, without rest.

They caw their hunger upon the cold wind
That chaps the frosty skin of the brown earth;
They scream their hatred of hardship and strife
For mere food, mere life.

Black and bitter serfs, bound to the soil,
They hate mankind for what men take away
In overlord fashion—never knowing how little
Fills many a pot or kettle.

Bound to the soil, with a bleak enmity
Against us, for they are reapers of reaped lands,

They cry the old cry that God does less than well
To make an earth that can be made a hell.

CHIMNEY-SWEEP

Fallen leaves skitter fleet
And elf-like down the street.
Winds have blown the moon awry,
It hangs a half-thing in the sky;
A sorry chimney-pot thing,
Sooty silver in a ring.
Time, the sweep, has brushed away
Half of it. . . . Alack-a-day!
Nothing's safe from the doom
Of Time's broom.

Nothing—neither love nor life,
Not friend, not wife!
Time, ruthless chimney-sweep,
Smudges all we would keep.
After him we must go
And ever clean the house of woe!

A METAPHYSICIAN DREAMS

When I had died and that small analyst,
The worm, came in to learn what I was made of,
My soul was still afloat there like a mist
Among the million dead cells of the brain.
To such a debonair materialist
That hardly seemed a thing to be afraid of,
So round he let it drift, while in disdain
He bored through flesh and bone to find their gist.

When he had finished and my body ran
To dust, with no mould more for him to measure,
He said, "Dear me, I've not advanced a span!

Yet surely atom-cycles should explain
 The creature: I must try another plan."
 He did, boring the dust with jaunty pleasure—
 And found himself again where he began.

RELATIVITY

Only this at last I say,
 Beauty that seemed so near is far.
 All men come to the end of day
 And see, *beyond*, the evening star.

Where I stand was once my goal;
 Now my goal is the dream I see
 Over the rim of the world; and so
 Goal and desire shall ever be.

Shall I lament it? Only the dead
 Reach a goal that is a goal.
 Eyes were meant as wings for the mind;
 Distance is the breadth of the soul.

LOWLINESS

At purple twilight when the snow lies deep
 And the cold stars are waking from day-sleep,
 When farm lights kindle warmly through bare woods
 Where screech-owls huddle softly in brown hoods,
 My heart turns, gently humbled, in my breast
 Toward simple things that age-long use has blessed:

A wood-fire on a cottage hearth; a shelf
 With the Good Book to teach myself my self.
 A child to lean and learn beside my knee,
 Or hers, who has been wife and child to me.
 A quiet bed and unperplexing sleep
 Near foddered kine and faithfully folded sheep.

THE WILD BOAR, TIME

Shall a man never rest
In the space he has cleared
By his hut in the forest?
Shall the wild boar, Time,
Running again,
Ever root him out?
Is gray hair nothing
And work well done
And wisdom stored?

I should like a little while
To muse without striving
Before life's over.
For no deed—none—
Is as good as a thought,
Save a kind one, maybe.
And where is the gain
Worth a moment of vision
Or a wine worth peace?

Go, wild swine,
To the doors of the young;
Drive *them* up the mountain.
I will drink this water in the valley.

LIFE GOES ON

Wade Ross turned from Vesta his wife to the window,
Love and guilt and desire to keep the thought of his guilt
Hid from her eyes—or the sight she had without eyes—
Sent sharp feelers of apprehension backward toward her.
He looked down over his land to the foggy coastline,
Along which plumed breakers marched shoreward,
To writhe their foamy ranks out on the sands,
And felt rebellion in him. So in his heart he cried,
"If it is true life *was* born in the slime yonder,

Between the tides and the rocks that make the spine of the world,

Am I indeed a slimy beast for using it

As I have—or have wished to—for its own purpose?

No . . . and again no! And yet . . .” He stopped, for behind him

He felt the frail face of Vesta stir in the shadow

Cast by a spur of the Santa Inez that beetled over

His ranch house of stone, built ten years before

For her and the lusty children he meant her to give him.

The day had been a day of brooding and breeding,

Of good and ill that had brought forth each after its kind.

But to Wade it had seemed ill only—with something yet

Left in its torn womb that fate had not ripped out;

Though overcharged of mood, and restless because of it,

He half craved calamity as his eye swept

The uneasy immensity of the Pacific that lay

Beyond him in the twilight—like another immensity

Without shore he had made for himself within himself.

For down below, on the beach curve three miles leeward

Where houses were strewn like abalone shells cast up

By an undue tide, was that of Denise his mistress,

Which now he doubly shunned to look toward

For fear the face behind him might see his thought upon it—

And his purpose of walking the sands again tonight secretly

Under the burning passion points of the high stars.

The gray sunset was passing slowly beyond the waters

Like a funeral pomp toward calm dissolution.

And as he watched, his mind, without volition,

Placed at the dark catafalque center of it

A form that he did not name or see shaped forth clearly

Yet knew that he wanted there—a trick of thought that stirred him

With sudden self-disgust and the confused question,

“What is obsessing me? Why, like a puling poet,

Do I put death or the trappings of it everywhere?

Before I went to Denise I didn’t . . . Before? God!

It's always that! Hadn't I right to go to her?
Hasn't a man a right to children—not to grow old
And die without a son to graft his name on the future?
I've lived with Vesta ten years—and the house is empty.
A woman without a child at her breast is not a woman,
Or grows, in time, meaningless—even a Vesta . . .
Though it is lies if I say I sought the house on the beach
For that only. The red gold hair of Denise,
And the white limbs and the hot laughing life of her
Have gotten into me like Spring, like a bewitching.
So am I worse than God if . . ." He was going to add,
"If I want to sweep all uncreative things away
And live as rich as a God . . ." but a poignant voice
Of conscience suddenly shot a naked answer,
A steely accusation, that struck quivering in him:
"What you want's to be rid of Vesta; you want her to die!"
And the shock of the accusal echoed so loud in him,
The shame of it, sprangling through each vein and fiber,
That fearing Vesta had heard he turned about quickly
As if to meet her mortally wounded bosom.
But when he saw that she only started up fearfully,
As if her flesh had sensed misfortune hanging over her,
And turned a warm quivering flood of brightness
Into the amber shade of a lamp near her,
He hurriedly sought to cover his guilt in the quick rags
Of thin querulous words, rasping out hoarsely,
As she stood, lips parted, and eyes dark with fear,
"I'm sick of the house—and all in it. I'm going out some-
where.
Nothing fares right—or thrives here, that I want to thrive.
The fruit rots—or the wheat. . . Three foals died today . . .
I sold the mares to Pedro—though the scoundrel cheats us
Penny and pound. . . What is the use of hoping or trying?
Why do we live? The world's too big—or too little,
I don't know which—and it doesn't matter. It's empty both
ways:
And emptiness is the worst prison of any to bear,
For it hasn't even walls that a man can beat and shatter—

Or hope to, in the end. . . . Do not look at me so . . .
I won't be back until late—perhaps tomorrow."

Whereon, having taken crop and cap from the wall,
Where he had hung them ready, he would have left her so,
Had not such a bewildering pain sprung to her eyes,
Such pleading and foreboding, that a memory rose
Of the night when he, her lover, had come like a wind from
the hills

And swept her with his youth and passion from her home
In the city where her beauty had been the desire of many.
Yet such is the heart of man that, while he felt remorse
And fear again lest she should glimpse his hidden wish
To be rid of her, and his shame was such that feigning again
He would have donned ragged words, had she herself not
quickly,

With hands folded across her body as if to protect it,
Said, "Don't go, Wade, again tonight. I don't ask often.
I want you to be free and happy. But I'm afraid—
Or not well, maybe. It's foolish. I shouldn't speak of it,
And wouldn't, but a dismay sinks me, as if something
Were going to happen—some misfortune, about to crash
Over us, over the ranch, over everything.
Stay in tonight, if you don't mind. You do love me?
There's something I want to tell you . . . something I'm sure
of now . . .

Wade . . . what is the matter?" The dread her question
carried

Was drawn out of her by his mien. But it fell like a spark
On the tinder of his intolerance; for he saw thwarted
His love-night on the star-symphonied sands with Denise.
"Can't you ask anything else than 'What is the matter?'" he
cried,

"When I say I'm sick of the ranch? I tell you a man
Wants more than going nowhere or grubbing the soil
For a wealth that isn't in it—or that sun or rain
Can wash away or ruin—or that an epidemic
Can . . ."

"What, Wade? What does a man want?"

Her eyes stood before him, firm as questioning angels
That he at last must answer, and that demanded further:
"And tell me what *you* want? Where do you go so often
Of nights? . . . What house is it you look toward
Down on the beach yonder when you stand at the window?"
And instantly with the question started such a tide
Of crimson up his cheek—such chagrin at a prescience
Pushing out tentacles of discovery toward him—
That, cutting at them, he cried, "You've taken to spying
then?"

And, seeing them fall low before the scythe of his words,
"I go to a house I want to go to." Then, more reckless,
For desperation is driven ever by need
To ease or end itself. "I go to the house
Of another woman. A man must find . . ."
"What, Wade?"

The angels of her eyes seemed to shake as she asked,
And all her body, as if it had been a shrine smitten.
But he, ridden unheedingly by his demon, answered,
"For generations the Ross blood, mine—you know it!—
Has run red and living, never a sterile house
Here or anywhere to fail of giving a son
To seed the future with its strain of pride and passion.
Love is much, and the vows of love. And I won't say
You haven't been a good wife. But . . ." In his pause for
words

The angels fell slowly, mistily, out of her eyes,
As if swept down by tears from unsealed fountains in her.
But he cried on against the strangling sight of them,
"I want children—even if they are not yours.
I want a son, and since . . ." He saw she was taking the words
As arrows into her heart, and that she let them stay,
As if to draw them out would draw her life out with them.
Then . . . "Yes," she said at length, "Children. I understand.
Children—and a mistress. And now that I . . . But no . . ."
She checked the tears and folding the shawl she wore about her
With a high pride, like one who must conceal something
That never must be known now, she said again

In a voice chill as that of a departing spirit
Utterly wounded by earth, "I understand. But children
Are not begotten thus; they are only slain so."
After which she went from the room, leaving upon
Its amber glow a sense of wrong done so heavy
That Wade stood as if embalmed in the maze of it.

II

A eucalyptus sighing dry in the wind without,
A willow's leafy withes sighing wet and soft,
Venus slanting silvery down to dip her beauty
Under the western waters at the world's end,
Sufficed to dissolve the maze that fixed Wade for a moment.
Then crushing his cap on his head he strode, with teeth
ground,

Out of the house to the stable-yard where he called Pedro.
The Spaniard sprang like a prairie-dog out of his hole.
"Saddle Reno. A tight girth," he ordered, beating
His crop on his boot as he stood in the black shadow
Of the spur that towered over the house with edged tallness.
Pushing fear out of him then and the hands of restraint
That hovered at his heart, he let his passion
And want of Denise mount—as *he* mounted soon
The pied mare who scented his mood and quivered sharply
When he reined her about and headed toward the house on
the beach—

Dim now in the growing darkness surging seaward.
Yet had he heard Vesta come to the door and cry
Again, "Wade, don't go," perhaps his fate would have
faltered.

But he only heard the flinty thrill of hooves under him,
And the high orchestrated stars beginning to send him
The first strain of the sweet blissful sin he intended;
And he only saw Denise, red-gold of hair and laughing,
With promise of children in a body too beautiful for them.
So down to the town and on through it to the sands beyond
He sped, trampling thick-leaved plants that lived on the brine;
Then on still, to a light, to a house, to the door of his mistress.

The foam-raveled black immensity of the Pacific,
With Venus sunk now, and that other vastity
Between himself and Vesta, made him shudder a moment
And almost turn back. But a breaker of music
Suddenly swelled with passion from within the house
And ran out over the sands and over the rhythmic sea
And over him like a counter-tide of sudden desire,
And swayed his brain and limbs with pulsing syncopation.
Denise had guests. Good. . . . There would be dance and
drink . . .

Then he would lie in her arms and tell her that he was hers—
That they would go away and leave the ranch to Vesta . . .
Vesta? . . . He looked back toward the house shadowed
By the sharp spur and had that chill vision again
Of the catafalque—but not on the cloudy west now:
In her chamber she lay upon a white bed.
And, seeing it, a memory of the years he had loved her
Shook his heart. But the breaking music again billowed
Out to him and floated the image of Denise
Through him with a ravishment not to be resisted.
Hitching, he went to the door. Denise was in the arms
Of a partner with whom her body swayed in the music's tide
As a sea-weed on the sea-floor; but edging in
He soon felt the ecstasy of her in his arms.
And, merged in the tide with her, while her eyes lit
The deep-enveloping dance-waters, he touched her lips
And let himself be borne out beyond all caring.
They danced and drank—and danced again and drank again
'Til the night drifted downward. Then: "Denise," he said,
In the shell of her ear with the sea-voice of his passion,
"I have thrown the world to the winds for you—Vesta even.
When will you toss your falterings away for me?"
"Isn't this good enough?" she answered, leading him out
Under a palm that opened its fan against the sky
And waved beauty from off the stars with plummy fronds.
But he: "No . . . I want children—your children.
Vesta has not given me any—and you have a body . . ."
"Made for joy and freedom, Wade, not for the fetters
Of child-bearing. And too . . . I am jealous of Vesta.

You only come to me because . . ." The music seethed
 Suddenly through the window again and flowed over them,
 Floating Denise off her feet, "Come," she cried,
 Plunging her arms into it as a swimmer might,
 "I want to dance—again, again!"

They went to the house,

He following after her like a leaf on the wind;
 But at the door, cap in hand, was Pedro now,
 Waiting, inquiring, looking for them. "Senor . . ." he said.
 And Wade, seeing the greasy apparition, was startled
 By the gnarly white face and the jetty forelock of it.
 "Why do you come here?" he asked, loathing
 The smell of earth and stable-yard the Spaniard brought
 With him into the purlieus of his paradise.
 And then, as Denise's poised beauty stood scenting
 The course of the scene with qualms of doubt, "Get out," he
 said;

"And never find me again—unless I want finding."
 "But, senor . . ." the Spaniard cringed insistent, not obeying:
 Which caused Wade's shaggy head to shake and Denise
 To laugh mockingly, then deride with gibing jealousy:
 "Friend wife wants him at home, doesn't she? Well, I'm
 going

In to dance, dance—and let him take his orders!"
 And so, with head high and lips proud and body
 A luring curve of draped amorous loveliness,
 She would have drawn Wade back with her into the music,
 Had Pedro not uttered, "But, senor . . . she is dying!"
 Seven stark syllables that fell so heavily
 Down Wade that he stood as if gutted by them.
 Which Pedro did not fail to see and so, advantaged,
 To add, with all the Latin in him tasting tragedy
 Beyond tragedy, "Senor, she is with child; my wife
 Have see it—t'ree month. But something have go wrong."
 And this he would have blazoned with more color and zest
 Of intimate detail. But into the husk of Wade—
 For husk he now was, with all strength purged from him—
 There rushed such fear, ferment, and grief and guilt and agony,
 Such memories of the girl he had wed, the wife he had loved,

Such understanding of all her beauty and long braveness,
That mind, heart and soul seemed to be fusing in him.

So without word or look at Denise, who stared at him
As at a man God-transformed and God-stricken
Beyond use or comprehension, he turned to his horse,
Stumbled up, blind and trembling, into the saddle,
Then with a sob that wrenched his throat stranglingly,
Like a noose thrown by a just fate about it,
He wheeled and spurred back through the gray of the dawn-
pallor
That mantled the mute east, to what awaited him.

III

There is a destiny that cannot be made by hands,
There is a destiny that cannot be stayed by hands,
There is a destiny under, a destiny over us,
A darker destiny that we make within us.
All of these were to be Wade's before the sands
Of his life, sifting through the slow hour-glass of time,
Sank from the heaven, where they had been, to hopeless hell.
He spurred and sped, the sob still noosing his throat, his eyes
Straining toward the spur and the lone house under it.
The April air was still, silent with growings.
The earth smelt of night that had slept upon its breast
And now was rising in mists and slipping softly away.
But Wade saw only a form on a bed and heard the cry
Of agony in him: "She will die. You wanted her to.
You made her bier; you laid her upon it; you left her so."
And the noose tightened at his throat until it seemed
That each flinty hoof-beat pounding under him
Would burst brain and vein with torture and retribution.
At length he reached the ranch gate, that hung open
As Pedro in haste had left it and that swung
Sagging as heavy, it seemed to him, as a broken tomb's.
He fell weakly from his saddle, his legs pithy
And prickling with a chill dread and a tense anguish,
Then hurried into the house, and up the stair to her chamber.
"Vesta!" he cried, seeing her lie under the face

Of shrunken Pepita, Pedro's wife, who watched above her.
"Vesta, I'm here . . . See; its Wade!" He sank beside her
And took her hand and looked upon her and waited
For answer to his cry, which he heard go wailing
Down the unfathomed dark ways of the unknown
In which her spirit wandered. "Vesta, I'm here; it's Wade!"
But no word came back, no echo, no recognition
Blowing out of the helpless void to which she had drifted.

IV

The end was the beginning, for Wade, of endlessness:
For life goes on, unrelentingly, unappeasably.
She lay so a day and a night—only a thread
Of breath in her throat slowly stitching the shroud
Of eternity about her; then death broke the thread.
Blindly Wade saw her body laid in the grave
With a few willows about to sigh a thin requiem
Over her, and the sea to chant antiphonals,
Then blindly and wanly he went back to the numb house
That blind and wan received him. On his bed he lay
Days and nights, 'til as a third weary dawn
Was about to find footing to climb over the east,
An earth-shudder, one of the many that quake under
The coast from time to time, caused him to wake thinking
That Vesta was coming back to him out of the tomb.
But fully awake he knew he was only nursing illusion.
He rose then and went out. The world was still the world,
Though not a world for him. But far more void henceforth
Than all in it was the gray house there on the beach,
Which, in the empty years to come,
He, who came to shrink from men and little children,
Looked down on dully, until at last it became
No more indeed than a shell long ago cast up
On the beach-curve by a flood-tide spent and forgotten.

MOUNTAINS IN THE GRAND CANYON

Each a primeval vastness, shaped by hands
Whose cosmic strength carved idly then forgot,

In half-created awfulness here stands,
For sun and wind and cloud and rain to rot.
No chaos do they seem, but as the work
Of a lone God, or one to purpose blind—
Who could not turn away from it, or shirk,
Yet without love or hope has wrought his mind.

And man was not when first their mythic shapes
Emerged Phantasmal in the Great Gulf's terror;
Nor shall man be when the last silence drapes
Their desolation's dread and deathless error.
For supra-human, supra-mundane, sunk
In dull and dread indifference they sit—
Abortive rock from whence all soul has shrunk,
Abandoned quarry of the Infinite.

BEWARE OF THE WIND

Beware of the wind when it talks to your heart:
It will say things darker than rain in the night;
It will say things older than life or light;
It will say things stranger than wrong or right.

Let it not tell too much of the world.
There was chaos once—and may be again.
There were seas unshaped for none to ken—
And the mystery of unmade men.

Beware lest it talk of the length of time
Before and after life has been,
Not of the brief brave spark between
That life is on earth's lonely scene.

Close your shutter and draw your blind,
Shut your heart and read of today;
For the wind comes from too far away
And says such things as none should say.

PLOWING

I saw an old woman plowing a field.
(What is life? What does it yield?)
The plow was heavy, the horse slow,
She swung at the handles and kept her row.
The ground was barren, her back bent,
Up and over the hill she went.
I saw her plowing at break of dawn,
Bravely at evening plowing on.
I saw an old woman plowing a field
For the crumb of bread its rock would yield.

HORIZONS

A man whose ships never come home
Looks ever to sea—it must be so;
Horizons are his destiny;
He has no other weal or woe.
Toil as he may at another keel
To launch upon another chance,
His heart sees only wind and wave
And night—and stormy circumstance.

SONGS FOR A WINTER FIRE

I

BEHIND THE WAINSCOT

Silence is louder than any noise is,
When you sit in an empty house,
For shut within it you can hear voices
Of yourself; they gnaw like a mouse.
They try to get out, into something,
But don't know what. They nose and push
At each wainscot of you, then—a rum thing!—
Suddenly they hush.

You don't know what they want to get out to,
If indeed they are yourself;
But each time they seem about to,
Something creaks, a chair, or a shelf;
Or a log burns through, or snow on the roof
Slips—and the chance they had is gone,
And *your* chance, too, to put to a proof
Things you have never dared venture on.

II

JUST WHY

Just why the wind more sadly blows
Through naked trees, I mean some day
To ask the winter-throated crows—
And that will prove but folly.
For crows won't even tell a man
When cold is coming, or a long span
Of snow and ice so deep and thick
That down on the very bed of the crick
The poor pent fish must burrow in mud—
Or do without a livelihood.
Or I will take the other way
And hear what the ash and elm say
About the matter; and they can't tell.
Each will merely say that it grieves
Because its limbs are orphaned of leaves;
And since nobody in need of ruth
Ever tells more than half the truth
About himself, that won't suffice.
So nothing's for it in the end
But just to make of the wind a friend—
And if his answer does not please
Believe what I will of naked trees.

III

COUNTRY NIGHTFALL

There are no paths when the snow comes,
No pavement when it goes,
Only a lane from a dark road
And a wood where the wind blows.

There are no lights—only a lamp
Set at a window pane,
And a woman waiting to make a heaven
For a man come home again.

IV

COUNTRY NIGHT

Of course there's a tree to listen to,
And stars if you can hear them,
And cattle breathing in the byre,
And an ash falling from the fire.
But what I mostly turn in bed
To hear is the early wheat,
Growing in the north meadow
Under the late sleet.

It isn't so much what it says
I listen to—not that;
But just to the sound of growing
Without thinking or knowing.
Of course something must tell it how,
But I have lived in cities
Too long to know what does—
And that is a thousand pities.

V

NOEL

To awake at dawn and remember new-dropt lambs
In a cold spring pasture many years ago

Was what befell me today. I heard their bleating
In the gray chill of the new world they had come to,
Not knowing it was a world, not knowing the womb
They had dropt from, but standing weak and still
In the frosty stubble, without so much as a first want
Or fear of life—of the two paths it opens upon
(One leading to briery danger),
Without foresense of shorn fleece and winds untempered.

I did not know why the remembrance came 'til a bell
Broke on my ear—a bell with a swathing sound
Of sleep on it, a sound new, strange and tender
As that in the birthing pasture—then an old beauty
Of words almost forgotten: "O Lamb of God,
O Lamb which takest away the sin of the world."

VI

WARM DAYS IN WINTER

When warm days come in the middle of winter
You know that the year is remembering its youth.
Cracks sound loud in the ice—to splinter
Your fear lest the stream is stilled past ruth.
Stirred by the thrill of their reassurance
You look at a birch to see if a bud
Is saying the same thing under the bark;
It seems that you could not have understood.

You go home thinking about it—and burn
An extra log on the fire that night.
You take down a book—a poet—and learn
Of the wild swan's call on her homing flight.
You go to bed, and your eyes close;
But the dark is green with a sense of life
Surging back to the frozen world;
And you dream of a faun's, or wood-nymph's, life.

VII

ZERO

Hard of heart, winter has frozen the fields.
Cold of heart, winter has stopped the streams.
Bleak of heart, it blights the last leaf-blade.
Bare of heart, it numbs the earth of dreams.

Crows blow by—like black chaff on the wind.
Suns sink down to rise on colder dawns.
Frosty stars cover the nights so chill
One dares not even think of lambs or fawns.

VIII

THINGS AT TWILIGHT

It is at twilight mostly that things want words,
Clouds on the west and trees against them black,
The evening star that has again come back,
The hill-fields and the high wind that herds
The wild geese 'til they hardly seem to be birds,
But torn leaves from the blown book of night,
Closed without any clue to tomorrow's light.

Yet it is not what men but trees could say
That matters most, for men speak but of themselves.
A star—and many come now by tens and twelves—
Could talk of eternity, or trees of the way
Their roots find life in the unliving clay.
Hills could talk of the might of their amassing,
And as for clouds, who knows so much of passing?

IX

OF SUCH STRANGE STUFF

Slowly my window darkens; each bare limb
Of the trees without is etched against the cold.
A moment since the day did not seem old,
Now it is creeping westward gray and grim.

Like age's very self it turned to go,
Clutching the dusk about it as a cloak,
Shuffling through fallen leaves of beech and oak,
With asthmic breath sighing into the snow.

Of such strange stuff is time—that through the heart
Walks with uncertain step winter and summer,
Too slow for youth, too fast for age, that number
And number grows with every season's start.
Who is not hurried by it or delayed
Of neither night nor morrow will be afraid.

X

BEFORE A JOURNEY

Tomorrow I shall set forth upon a journey.
Out in the twilight now I see the trains
Panting toward the cold country snow-lands
With frosty breath and kindled window panes.
The house is strange and still, knowing I purpose
To lock its doors and hush it with drawn blinds.
"Why does he go? Why does he go?" it questions.
"What is it in the world outside he finds?"

Too little or too much, dear house! For one
Who travels away from self or who is bent
On hope-begotten adventure often misses
The calm efficiency of heart-content.
When I come back then from a hundred cities
And wash away the travel-stain and tire,
I shall not know whether my gains are riches
'Til I assay them 'round a home-lit fire.

THE WILD GEESE COME OVER NO MORE

The wild geese come over no more
As when I was a boy
With their high sweet honking
That lifts the heart with joy.

Their chill aery paths are changed,
The lake awaits in vain
For a tired wing to drop to it
And rise at dawn again.

The wild thoughts of my high youth
Have left my heart too—
Driven away by the hard huntsmen,
Memory, care, and rue.

SUDDEN BEAUTY

Go look around the house corner
And you will see the evening star
As clear as if you stood in fields,
Where no streets or factories are.

A melting brilliance! Yet as cool
Into the heart its light sinks
As bubbles under a waterfall
At which a buck or a doe drinks.

You need not put your hat on;
Ten steps around, and you will see
Why earth is not enough for men—
Or, maybe, immortality.

FEE SIMPLE

I have bought me a bed in earth
With a cover of grass and flowers,
An evergreen tree overhead,
And I shall sleep hours and hours.

In fact I do not mean to awake
At anyone's want or will,
For dawn will not come or work to do
Or grief to suffer—and still.

I'll sleep as long as I please,
Nor ever once turn or sigh.
And best of all I shall not know
That I who am sleeping am I.

IN CITIES

In cities you watch the way of wind with smoke
And if you are country-born you think of trees
Tossing their boughs, and doubt if factories
Should ever be fed forests of ash and oak.
You watch the way of rain, making a fog
Of soot that sinks down from the chimney tops,
And you think of mist over a meadow bog,
And your heart remembering beauty almost stops.

There is a little vale I once lived in,
Just a white house or two, a store and a steeple,
A street and a few lamp posts, where a road had been,
And nothing so very wonderful as to people.
But the blackbirds for uncounted years have returned
To nest within the green night of its pines,
And there isn't a heart for miles 'round but has learned
Delights deeper than any a city divines.

EXCLUSIONS

(St. Jean-de-Luz)

Across my thoughts the old wash of the sea,
And the evening star breaks out in golden speech.
(The little poets say do not write of the moon and stars.)
A church bell deepens the twilight's mystery
Like a voice of centuries that have no history
But are only a dream and memory of God.
(The little poets say do not write of God.)

Beyond the gray breakwater the mountains tower.
(What is so strong as beauty, so new as a new-born star?)

The gray bell hushes, but not the voice of the Universe.
(I think there are yet things to be said of God.)

WEST OF EDEN

We have fared west of Eden, far from peace,
Westward of Eden, breeding and dying,
The old race of Adam, seeking surcease,
The children of Cain, cursing and crying.

Far west of Eden, bearing our burden,
Wearing our sorrow, tilling the earth,
Wondering what shall at length be our guerdon
When we have bettered the seed of our birth.

Eden was ignorance; tasting the apple
Stung us to testing atom and star.
Speech of the serpent was prompting to grapple
With life as it is, things as they are.

Over the world we have fared, westing,
Farther away from the bliss of the brute,
Wanting it, hating it, yet in our questing
Glad to have eaten the fatal fruit.

FLIGHTS

(Near Old Orchard, Maine)

English herons brought for sport to a new land
Have bred here in pine-nests of the sea-marshes yearly
For more seasons than any man lives.
In the hot light of the June sun they flounce up squawking,
Then settle back on forks of the dead-tree branches—
While the tide beneath them ebbs and flows and sighs
Through channels of ooze hid in the dank silt-grasses.
Yet now no hoodless hawks hover to strike them:
That game is gone and the players of it forgotten
In sportless churchyards cresting the sea-granite.

But the greater game of a younger land usurps it:
Men wing in and out among the sunsets,
Or take off boldly at dawn like hovering herons
To span the Atlantic to hereditary shores.

Where is Leif Ericson? . . . Where is Columbus? . . .
In a few centuries more will the moon be a port of call
For worlds of outer space?

NIGHT VOYAGE

There is no climate for stars. But upon earth,
Where cloud-winds of evil blow unpeaceably,
Imagination, the primal aviator,
Voyages ever unstably. Waking at night
And fueled by the quick memories of day,
It takes off with troubled foreboding to round
Our yet uncharted sphere—over huge longitudes
That rib seas and continents, through great mountain-gates
That lead by river trails to turbid plain-cities,
Then on, down, and under, until returning
It reaches the bitter hangar of the breast.
Everywhere under the flight the loud surge
Of living and dying comes up, and, pitifully,
The procreative pageant of humanity
Writhing toward no certain goal but death.
What shall be done that a million years have not done
To ease the valiant anguish it wings over;
To heal men of the hurt of being men
On a necessitous planet? Can the stars answer?

IN THE GREAT FLUX

Two gulls, a gray and a brown, veterans both
At tide-fishing, dived to the sea for the same minnow
And struck fierce heads together in the high surf-foam.
The gray sheered away screaming; the brown beaked the prey
And fed one of the three hungers that trouble flesh.
The sea, that neither heeds nor knows such hungers,

Pushed in, purple-streaked and multitudinous,
 On the red brawn of the granite. Its heaving undervoice
 Huge and primevally hoarse, had no word to say
 Of life and the mind-and-body-hungering breed of men,
 Strangely emerged out of the marshy shore-slime,
 But rather with sweeping cosmic sway disowned them.
 For what has infinite surging to do with trivial selves
 That gather together in brief brains and clamor "I!";
 With little winged minds that dive desperately
 For minnows of knowledge in star-deeps and clash together
 And sheer off crying unsatedly because all knowledge
 Begets but greater hunger? Thought, the measurer,
 May chart seas, or starry abysses above them;
 May even stride infinity and find it fused
 Irrefutably with a Life and Being that alone
 Can give worth to any width however vast.
 But no foothold in the great flux is fixed thereby
 For fearful men; the space-terror still will abide;
 And still troubled they will continue to quest and cry
 Like hungry gulls,—knowing that death, the folder of wings,
 May fold them from all food and flight forever.

I HAD FORGOTTEN

I had forgotten she was dead, though once I had loved her.
 It was seeing how she would turn her head
 To say goodbye, as she used of old,
 That brought her back.

Where, in all the world's flux, is there a dream that will stay!
 Once she was all the beauty, all the meaning of night and day to me;
 Now she is only a petal I find
 At a chance-turned page in the book of the past.

Is she bending her head in the same way
 To say goodbye to some other lover?
 Why have I opened the book again at this page?
 She was dear, once—and I am still foolishly young.
 Shall I never age?

THANATOPSIS FOR HETTY

Hartman's seamstress, Hetty,
Losing the road to sleep,
Then work too, sought death—
To make *it* pay her keep.

They bought her a cheap coffin
And a bare lot on a hill
And a dress she did not have to make,
But only to lie in, still.

She slept quite well in earth:
Never sewing a seam,
Never saving a penny,
Never having a dream.

Even forgetting the lover
Who came, and went away,
When she was one and twenty:
She slept quite well in clay.

For Hartman sent flowers,
To cover the grave's need;
And the priest said he hoped
The Lord would pardon her deed.

And *every* one was kind—
As Hetty would have said.
As everyone is—
To the no-more-needy dead.

FOODS

My roof is slate, my windows look
To east and westward over the town.
My walls are phalanxes of books
Whose thoughts march through me, up and down.

On streets about me stands a church
 Whose bell sounds over the wind's tone,
 A factory whose whistle shrieks
 That men should live by bread alone.

Yet well they know they cannot—for
 It is not bread they want most,
 But foods not to be had save through
 A holy—or unholy—ghost.

I say this while the rain falls,
 I say it while the wind blows,
 I say it though what hearts should say
 No heart knows.

THE WINTER IS LONG

Low autumn clouds and a wind to take them anywhere.
 Wild flying leaves, that do not know they are dead,
 Because the limbs they have fallen from are unforgotten,
 And all spring said.

Rain is coming, and with it cold, the traveller,
 Out of the north, to harden the earth with frost.
 Then those children of death, the leaves, will lie down quietly,
 No longer wind-tossed.

This has happened before. This will happen forever.
 The old habits of earth are strange and strong.
 Turn monk or faun, then—and pray, or rove the woods joyfully.
 The winter is long.

I

A WOMAN OF SIXTY

The shock came when I went up to her coffin
 And looked upon her satin-pillowed face.

I had known her long,
But of soul had never seen in her a trace.
Her life had been a bitterness and a malice,
A venom against all visions of the spirit,
Beauty, I knew, had never touched her mind,
And nothing akin to beauty had come near it.
A cackling laugh that said all swans were geese,
A bigot sneer that slandered every fineness,
A jealousy that jaundiced her—because
Her being was ever devoid of all divineness.
Loving none but the offspring of her body,
And wanting to suckle them beyond due time,
The bliss of her infatuate motherhood
Seemed hardly more than sentimental slime.
Obsessed with a desire for domination,
That shaped her mouth to fish-like egotism,
Her tongue clacked with inanities that rent
Faith in her virtues with distaste and schism.
All this and more I had seen. But now strange death
That takes the soul, had done a stranger thing;
It had given a soul to her—endowed her brow
And lips and lids beyond imagining.
For calmness sat where bitterness had been,
And silence where coarse cackling laughter carked.
And where the snarling sneer had nostriled her
Eternity—and majesty—were marked.
And jealousy no longer jaundiced her;
For who is jealous of the Infinite?
Sublimity enswathed her like a dream;
On her divinity was deeply writ.
And now her motherhood was only Nature's,
Within whose womb she soon again would lie.
Her self was selfless—and its littleness
Was great with all the peace of those who die.
Therefore my shock, as leaning over the coffin
I looked upon her satin-pillowed face.
All that had been unlovely had to all
That might have been immortal given place.

II

A SELF-SERVER

Such was his greed of life and dread of the voidness of the tomb,
 That he bade us bury a clock with him in the grave's gloom;
 A clock that would run a year and a day, after his heart stopped.
 Open the coffin. . . . Look. He listens to it, with lids dropped.

Look at his brow. It is so still he will be sure to hear
 As he turns to dust the strange tick of an unallotted year.
 He ever wanted more than his share of everything, and so
 Has taken a year of time with him, after his time to go.

Look at his face, so callous and contemptuous of worth,
 So earthy that it is strange he dreaded at last the still earth.
 Forgetful of all soul-things he has gone to the soul's clime,
 And has taken with him only the pale posthumous tick of time.

III

AN IDEALIST

Last night I left him very ill:
 Cover his face; it is too still,
 It is too cold and stark.
 These were the words I read in his eyes
 As he turned toward the Dark:
*The winds of death blow all lights out,
 As a man goes to the tomb,
 Save the one candle light of faith
 That flickers in the gloom.
 His mind gutters and smokes in his brain,
 And desire's flame fades out,
 But always there is one faint beam
 Throwing before him a brave gleam,
 And denying life is only a dream
 Wrought by an atom-rout.*

These were his words. Cover his face;
 Soul from it has gone.

Light a candle in its place:
He fares farther on.

SON AND MOTHER

Do you know what you are fighting against, fatuous mother
Of the adolescent boy, who does not turn to heed you?
The desire of Paris for Helen; Caesar's for Cleopatra,
No longer does he need you.

One kind of passion in your arms he learned of you.
But now he cannot remember your soft thrilling breasts.
He can only feel that the girl budding beside him there
Is all his quests.

Do you imagine you can call him back to you,
Or bribe away his years with amorous mothering?
It were as easy to bribe the wild young oak yonder
To refuse the sap of Spring.

He is no longer a son. His passion is prouder and older
Than motherhood; so he masters you, as his father did.
His father is dead. And himself is the sire of the future.
In the girl a mother is hid.

Do you not see your caresses are the *past* to him?
He feels in your eyes what he loathes to think has ever been
In the eyes of any before. Young love would have creation
With itself begin.

Under the leaves he leads her. Adam of old led Eve so.
He does not need you. Fold your hands, and go; it is fate.
In a year the cry of a child will suffer him to remember.
Go—and wait.

NO ROOM

There never was room for her anywhere,
Whatever we planned to do,
If we rode on the river or into the hills,

The seats were one too few.
 Of course, when there was work to be done,
 We called her a dear, and she did it.
 Achievement over, *we* took the praise;
 None thought of her amid it.

Grown older—and ill, she had small care of us,
 Less of the hospital.
 'It's really too bad,' we said, and forgot;
 And death came, and the pall.
 To the funeral draped in wreaths of *rain*
 We meant to go, no doubt.
 Before there was room for her in the grave,
 It had to be baled out.

And after? . . . Well . . . What would you have?
 Living thoughts and days
 Never have room for a dead woman,
 Useless to their ways.
 Perhaps there's a fibre in some one of us
 Holding still a regret
 That bears her name. Lelia, was it? . . .
 Lena? Louise? Lisette?

YOLANDA OF CYPRUS

CHARACTERS

RENIER LUSIGNAN	A descendant of the Lusignan Kings of Cyprus
BERENGERE	His Wife
AMAURY	His Son, Commander of Famagouste under the Venetians
YOLANDA	The Ward of Berengere, betrothed to Amaury
CAMARIN	A Baron of Paphos, Guest in the Lusignan Castle
VITTIA PISANI	A Venetian Lady, also a Guest
MORO	A Priest
HASSAN	Warden of the Castle
HALIL	His Son, a Boy
TREMITUS	A Physician
OLYMPIO	A Greek Boy, serving Amaury

ALESSA	}	Berengere's Women
MAGA		
CIVA		
MAURIA		
SMARDA		Slave to Vittia
PIETRO		In Vittia's pay
PRIESTS, ACOLYTES, ETC.		

Time:—The Sixteenth Century

Place:—The Island of Cyprus

YOLANDA OF CYPRUS

ACT I

SCENE: A dim hall, of blended Gothic and Saracenic styles, in the Lusignan Castle, on the island of Cyprus near Famagouste. Around the walls, above faint frescoes portraying the deliverance of Jerusalem by the Crusaders, runs a frieze inlaid with the coats-of-arms of former Lusignan kings. On the left and back is a door hung with heavy damask curtains, and in the wall opposite another. Farther down on the right a few steps, whose railing supports a Greek vase, with jasmine, lead through a chapel to the sleeping apartments. In the rear, on either side, are guled lattice windows, and in the centre an open partly grated door looking upon a loggia, and, across the garden below, over the moonlit sea. Seats are placed about, and, forward, a divan with rich Turkish coverings. A table with a lighted cross-shaped candlestick is by the door left, and a lectern with a book on it, to the front right.

As the curtain rises, the Women, except CIVA, lean wearily on the divan, bored and nearly asleep. HALIL near is singing dreamily to a lute:

Ah, the balm, the balm,
 And ah, the blessing
 Of the deep fall of night
 And of confessing;
 Of the sick soul made white
 Of all distressing:
 Made white—ah balm of night,
 And ah, the blessing!

(The music falls and all seem yielding to sleep, when suddenly there are hoof-beats and sounds at the gate below. HALIL springs up)

HALIL

Alessa! Maga! Voices at the gate!

(All start up)

Someone has come!

ALESSA

Boy, Halil, who?

HALIL

Up, up!

Perhaps Lord Renier—No: I will learn.

(He runs to the curtains and looks)

It is Olympio! Olympio!

From Famagouste and Lord Amaury!

MAURIA

Ho!

And coming here?

HALIL

As he were lord of skies!

To Lady Yolanda, by my lute!

MAGA

Where is she?

ALESSA

I do not know. Find her, Mauria.

MAURIA

Stay!

His word may be of the Saracens.

HALIL

(calling)

O-Ho!

(He admits OLYMPIO, who enters insolently down. They press around him gaily.)

MAURIA

Now, what, Olympio, from Famagouste?

What tidings? Tell us.

MAGA

See his sword!

OLYMPIO

Stand off!

MAURIA

The tidings then! Tell us!

OLYMPPIO

None, titling,

For you—or any scandal-monger here!

MAURIA

So-ho, Cupid? None for us indeed—?
Of the Saracens huddling yesterday
For haven at Keryneia—?

HALIL

(dashed)

Who has told you?

MAURIA

Of the forty galleys westing up the wind,
Scenting the shores as timorous as hounds,
Till twenty of them went down?

OLYMPPIO

If you'd know,

Ask Lord Amaury when he comes tomorrow,
Or seek him out tonight. To Lady Yolanda
I'm sent—and not to tattle silly here.

(He is starting off but stops, hearing laughter. It is CIVA who
enters holding a parchment up)

Oh! only Civa! . . .

CIVA

Stay, Olympio,

And hear! Why so hasty, cockerel?

(As he goes)

May never virgin love him, even in dreams!
Gone as a thistle!

MAURIA

(laughing)

But now, what have you there, Civa? Verses?

(Takes them)

CIVA

Written upon papyrus out of Paphos,
And found hid in the garden!

ALESSA

(startled)

In the . . .? where?

CIVA

Beside the fountain, under the marble feet
Of chaste Diana!

MAGA

Where Sir Camarin

And oft our lady—?

MAURIA

Hist! no names, Maga:

Someone may hear and snip our tongues for it.
But let Alessa read them—Civa cannot!

CIVA

Nor you, duck. But I'll take oath on it,
They are of love!

MAURIA

Yes, of swooning love!

Of sighing, dying love! Of queen's kisses,
And princes bursting through enchanted bounds
To ladies prisoned in an ogre's keep!

MAGA

(watching ALESSA)

No; they are of sorrow! Alessa's face
Betrays it; see!

CIVA

Oh, you ever sigh

For sorrow, Maga, like a mawkish nun.

ALESSA

(crumpling the parchment)

Be silent, all of you. What's written here
Was meant only—

MAURIA

For whom? tell us! read them!

Or give them back, for they are Civa's.

ALESSA

No.

MAURIA

Tell us the name then—of him who wrote them!

ALESSA

Not that either.

CIVA

Then they hide some guilt,

Of someone you adore!

MAURIA

Who?

CIVA

Of someone

Within the castle—perhaps Lady Yolanda!
Will you deny it?

ALESSA

You know well, Civa—

(Starting)

Be still! Our lady and Sir Camarin!

(Both have appeared on the loggia)

MAGA

(low)

They heard us, Alessa? . . . He is troubling her!

MAURIA

That is the mouse in the cupboard then? The trap
Was baited with the verses? Ho, indeed!

ALESSA

Quiet, I say! She's coming here. (As BERENGERE
enters) My lady?

BERENGERE

(enforcedly)

It is time now, and past, for your *aves*
And lamps—and for overneeded sleep.
But first I'd know if yet Lord Renier
Has . . . Why are you so strange?

ALESSA

We, madame?

BERENGERE

All of you;

And secret too.

ALESSA

We have but put away

The distaff and the needles.

BERENGERE

... That may be.

(CAMARIN enters)

And yet you do not seem—

ALESSA

Shall we go now?

Our lamps are ready. We but waited word.

BERENGERE

Go—and send me Hassan. (They do so quickly.) (She sits down troubled,
then): You saw, Camarin?

They were not as their wont is.

CAMARIN

To your eyes,

By Berengere, that apprehension haunts.

They were as ever; so, have done with fear.

(Sits down by her)

BERENGERE

I cannot!

CAMARIN

To the Abyss with it! Tonight

Is ours,—Renier tarries at Famagouste—

Is ours for love—and for a long delight.

BERENGERE

Whose end may be—

CAMARIN

Dawn and the dewy lark!

And passing of all presage from you.

BERENGERE

(rising)

No.

For think: Yolanda saw us under the cypress.

And too, the dream I had that with a cross

I by some means should bring bitterness on her,
Deep bitterness . . .

CAMARIN

Dreams, my love, are a brood

Born of the night and not of destiny.
She does not guess our guilt, and Renier
Clasps to her breast ambition for a bride—
Ambition for Amaury.

BERENGERE

None can say.

He's much with this Venetian, our guest,
Though Venice binds us with more tyranny
Than would the Saracen.

CAMARIN

He hopes, I tell you,

To use her, and through her the Pisani,
All-powerful in Venice,
To bring his dynasty up from decay.

BERENGERE

But *her* design, then? And what requital
Does he entice her with? . . . No; some evil
Will come of it, surely to us some evil,
Or to Yolanda and Amaury's love.—
But there; the women.

CAMARIN

(getting up) And all too brief their stay.
What signal for tonight?

BERENGERE

Be in the garden.

Upon the loggia yonder I will wave
The candle-sign, when all are gone to sleep.

CAMARIN

And with its beam I will mount up to you
Quicker than ecstasy!

BERENGERE

(fearfully) I'm blown as a leaf
Before the windy raging in your love.
Go, go.

CAMARIN

But to return unto your breast!
(He leaves her by the divan.) (The WOMEN re-enter with silver
lighted lamps. Behind them are HASSAN—and the slave
SMARDA. All await BERENGERE'S pleasure.)

BERENGERE

(starting, still troubled)
I had forgotten. Lead the way, Alessa,
The chapel's ready. Hassan, see to the gates:
Close them.

HASSAN

And chain them, lady?

BERENGERE

Wait no longer.
Lord Renier will not come.

HASSAN

He sent no word?

BERENGERE

Only from Nicosie, which he had left
With the priest Moro.

HASSAN

But tonight—

BERENGERE

Close them.

(To the WOMEN)

And you, no chattering, after your prayers!
(Follows them out.—HASSAN turns away broodingly unaware
that SMARDA has remained)

HASSAN

Her mood! there's some reason for it. What
And why is Lady Yolanda so beset?

She weeps in secret . . . By God, is it the Paphian?
 Or she of Venice? Have they . . .? (Aware of SMARDA) How,
 Slave? . . .

Why are you slinking here?

SMARDA

I was bid to:

My mistress.

HASSAN

Pah! your mistress has, I think,
 Something of Hell in her and has unpacked
 A portion in this castle . . . Is it so?

SMARDA

My lady is of Venice!

HASSAN

And with Venice

Should sink into the sea—as you shall
 If now—

SMARDA

Touch me not!

HASSAN

I will wring

Your tongue out sudden if it gives me lives.
 (Grasping her)

What of your lady and Lord Renier?

What do they purpose?

SMARDA

Fool-born, look around,

(Has seen RENIER entering with MORO)

Then spill your silly questions!

HASSAN

(looking)

A fool I am.

(To RENIER, releasing her)

My lord—?

RENIER

Where is my wife?

HASSAN

You have returned?

This slave stung me to pry.

RENIER

Was she not here?

HASSAN

A moment since she went, the women with her.
She spoke of your return.

RENIER

(mordantly)

And wherefore did?

HASSAN

Have you not, sir, been gone? It was said so.

RENIER

Not farther than . . . the nearest wind; as she
Shall learn, and her Yolanda. Get within.
And not a hint of my return to any.

(Turning, when he is gone)

You, Moro, have thus far dissuaded me,
But now, whether suspicion eats in me,
Doubt, dread, and mistrust of my fortunes,
Or whether it is desire, and unsubduable,
To see Amaury sceptred, I care not.

(To SMARDA who crouches listening)

Come here, Scythian . . . Now, go to your mistress
And say that I have chosen.

MORO

My lord!

RENIER

Chosen!

None can be great who will not hush his heart
To hold a sceptre—and Amaury must.
He is Lusignan, and his lineage
Must drown in him Yolanda's loveliness.

MORO

It will not!

Then at least I shall learn

What this Venetian hints.

MORO

Concerning whom?

Your wife? or Yolanda?

RENIER

Do not name them.

They've shut me from their souls.

MORO

Rather, I think,

The door was closed by you.

RENIER

Because they pity me,

Knowing that I am loveless and have lost
 What makes love possible . . . But with Amaury
 It is not so! And this Venetian—

MORO

Distrust her!

RENIER

She has power.

MORO

But not truth;

Nor faith nor reverence. Yesterday
 She jested at the chapel's holy relics.

RENIER

She loves Amaury, who, if wed to her,
 Would be undoubted governor of Cyprus:
 The throne then but a step.

MORO

But one too wide,

If he must take it severed from Yolanda.
 She's Heaven to him.

RENIER

Then the Venetian

Has ways to fether his infatuation—
 To flush him out of it.

MORO

(much perturbed) She has said so?

RENIER

Not in undevious words. But . . . why now
Are *you* so whetted?

MORO

So always am concerned where there is evil.

I am a priest, my lord,

RENIER

(as VITTIA appears left)
Who is it you suspect?

VITTIA

(advancing) My lord, women.
The Holy Church instils that in him.

MORO

(flushing, to RENIER) Pardon.
(He bows and goes abruptly. VITTIA
laughs)

RENIER

Lady of Venice, you come softly.

VITTIA

Streets

Of sea in Venice teach us that, my lord.

RENIER

And do they teach a woman—?

VITTIA

To speak of the Church so?

(With a more equivocal air)
Our prelates there are *men*, my lord, who know—
That beauty has no master.

RENIER

And, having none,

Will dare anything?

VITTIA

(shrugging) Less, believe me,
Than do some here—though not of course your lady,

Or her Yolanda—concerning whom I'm here.

(Sitting down)

You sent for me?

RENIER

I did . . .

VITTIA

To say you've chosen?

And offer me irrevocable aid

To win Amaury?

RENIER

Against my need of it

I'm impotent.

VITTIA

As I am—against mine.

Therefore I'm ready now with an assurance.

(Rising)

Hourly I am expecting out of Venice

Letters of power; and what I pledge you is

That soon he shall be overlord of Cyprus

And of these blue Mediterranean seas

That rock so restfully about its coast.

That I pledge—and more.

RENIER

Of what, so subtly?

VITTIA

Of honor that needs protecting too, unless—

(Sees SMARDA re-entering)

SMARDA

(quickly)

My lady, she's not asleep!

VITTIA

Who, my turtle?

Yolanda?

SMARDA

As you bade me to, I watched her.

She's coming here.

VITTIA

Then, my lord . . . go.

Go, and leave her to me.

RENIER

After so much

Has chanced? At this juncture when she . . . No!

I'll stay and confront her.

VITTIA

Ignorantly?

Blindly, and peril all?

RENIER

I will return then.

(displeased)

And not be unreasonably put off.

(Goes, by the loggia)

(YOLANDA enters. Her gaze is on the floor—
till she sees VITTIA. The SLAVE slips out)

VITTIA

Pardon: you seek the women?

YOLANDA

I do not seek them.

VITTIA

(smiling)

Nor me, perhaps, your guest, since they are gone?

YOLANDA

Only if I could hope, by doing so,
To pierce the labyrinth of your intent.

VITTIA

Why then you shall tonight, and easily—
If you will follow the thread of—

YOLANDA

What?

VITTIA

Love.

YOLANDA

You say so strangely. It is a thread that might
Indeed lead in, but not out . . . Love of whom?

VITTIA

Of her you call mother—and who is
Amaury's.

YOLANDA

Were it so, had I but
To love her, only that, to penetrate you,
The lairs in you would be as clear to me
As shallows under Morpha's crystal wave.

(Turns to go)

VITTIA

Unproven you speak so.

YOLANDA

And proven would.

VITTIA

(pointedly)

Then in her need—save her!

YOLANDA

(startled)

From whom?

How . . .? From what?

VITTIA

Is it not clear?

YOLANDA

From nothing at all.

VITTIA

Yet surety leaves your cheek and shrinks dead
Upon your heart, though you are innocent

(Laughs)

Over what brink she hangs?

YOLANDA

Over no brink!

VITTIA

But to her lord is constant?

YOLANDA

Who denies it?

VITTIA

And to his bed is true? and Camarin
Of Paphos is her *friend*—her *friend* only,
As you have feigned, to shield her?

(A pause)

Your voice belies your lips avowing so,
Knows better than believing what they say.

YOLANDA

(baffled and beset)

If it is so, Lord Renier must not know,
Nor even come to suspect! I have misled
His thought from her to me, so that the danger
Of open shame may pass. Then Sir Camarin
Will go, as he came, and her release
From the remorse and sin fettering her
Will seem as sweet as paths to Paradise:
For none then would betray her.

VITTIA

None?

YOLANDA

(staring)

The still insinuation of it! . . . *You* would?
That is the beast then of the labyrinth
Within you?

Your tone—

VITTIA

If it be so, who will think
Uncovering an adultery is worse
Than a concealment of it?

YOLANDA

(hardening)

Forthrightly your intent, not as you have
With slanting hints and evil intimations.
The name of Berengere Lusignan must
Go clear unto the years, fair and unsullied;
Nor must the bloody edge of death fall on her,
As well it may, from Lord Renier's sword,
If drawn in the frenzy of suspicion.

Speak as a woman

Whatever she has done she is holy
 To me, who am proud to call her mother;
 For all that I have of joy here, or freedom,
 Laughter and roses, day-song of the sea,
 Not bitterness and loneliness and blight,
 I have because of her,
 All the bright world of faces and of voices,
 Tender, earthly, and dearer far to me
 Than any can be past death—
 Oh all the beauty I was once forbid!
 For it was she, who, with a word of love
 Uplifted me—a lonely convent weed,
 A cloister thing unvisited of dew,
 Withering and untended and afar
 From the remembered ruin of her home—
 And planted me, here, in happiness.
 So for her all I am!

VITTIA

Or—hope to be?

YOLANDA

Your silence has a price. Name it briefly.
 I will not see her betrayed.

VITTIA

Why, to you then,

Whose gratitude and faith are so boundless,
 It is—that you renounce Amaury's love.

YOLANDA

(stunned, at a loss)

You ask . . . that? You ask that of me,
 The one thing . . .? You would rend me there,
 Where not Eternity could heal the wound
 Though all the River of God might be for balm?
 So cruel and so ruthless you cannot be?
 Today a swallow fell on the battlements,
 Escaping the hawk. You soothed and set it free.
 You would not then . . .?

VITTIA

(scornfully)

As I can, to rule over all Cyprus?

Can you give him power,

YOLANDA

I had forgot. You are a liege of Venice,
Whose burdening is vast upon this land.
But I am not a slave.

VITTIA

(harshly)

Safety shall crumble under your feet and hers.

If you refuse,

YOLANDA

And self-aborrence, did I yield, would haunt me,
Abhorrence worse than your low love of him.
Therefore, goodnight.

VITTIA

Wait! or on tomorrow—

(Sounds heard at the gate cause YOLANDA
to start)

VITTIA

(seeing her joy)

That is Amaury? You are expecting him?

(The gate chains fall)

If it is so, vow at once, I tell you.

To force him from you—or Lord Renier

Shall hear the one word that shall transmute

His wrong into a madness.

(BERENGERE enters)

YOLANDA

(turning to her)

Mother—?

BERENGERE

It is Amaury,

Sped from his post and seeking you, Yolanda.

(looking from one to the other)

But what, now, has befallen?

YOLANDA

(realizing)

Seeking me?

VITTIA

(low to YOLANDA)

Tonight must be the end.

YOLANDA

Go, and quickly.

BERENGERE

(as VITTIA does so arrogantly)

What chance, or mishap, thus confuses you?

YOLANDA

I cannot see him now, mother, I cannot!

Defer him but a little—until tomorrow—

(as BERENGERE stares astonished)

Or till I—

BERENGERE

For what reason—that is reason?

YOLANDA

No matter. Go and say I am asleep,

Or ill, or at confession—anything,

Any delaying thing, even that I—

Mother, ah, you must. If you do not—

(a clank of armor is heard)

Too late! It is his step unmistakable

Along the corridor. Leave me with him.

(BERENGERE goes dubiously, by the loggia)

AMAURY

(parting the curtains)

Yolanda! My Yolanda! You are here?

(coming down and clasping her)

My own, my beloved! . . . Once again

To touch you is as triumph to the blood,

Is as the boon of battle to the strong.

YOLANDA

(after they kiss)

Release me, Amaury, and say why

You've come . . . Have the Saracens—?

AMAURY

Of them, now,

No word! Nor of any other evil.

(lifting her face)

But only tribute incense, to this beauty,
 Dear as the winds waft from deathless shrines
 Of mystery and myrrh—though I should need
 The silvery eloquence of quickened moons,
 Pouring upon the midnight magically,
 To tell you half the yearning in my heart.

(gazing at her caressingly)

Slow sullen speech, come to my soldier lips,
 Rough with command and impotent of softness . . .
 Come to my lips, or fill my eyes so full
 That love unutterable shall seem as sweet
 To my Yolanda. (holding her off) But tears, now?
 You weep?

YOLANDA

Amaury—

AMAURY

What have I done—too pronely pressed
 You to this coat of steel?

YOLANDA

Ah, no!

AMAURY

My words then

Are too untutored?

YOLANDA

No! But sweet, Amaury,
 Sweet as the roses of Damascus crusht,
 Your love is! Oh sweeter than the dreams
 Of April nightingales on Troados,
 Or gushing by the springs of Chitria!
 Take me closer into your arms then,
 Clasp me, and enfold me, and hold me;
 Fast to your being press me—and bless me
 With the brave power of your manhood's might.

AMAURY

But tears? How? . . . I do not understand.

YOLANDA

Only a folly—a groundless frailty.

AMAURY

(going to the lectern)

You've been again at some old tale of sorrow,
Sighing along the pages of a book,
This one—of that Italy madonna
Whose days were sad, I have forgotten how.

(turns a page)

Is it not so?

YOLANDA

The tears of women, Amaury,
May come without our wish, and from no fount
Of reasoned whence or why.

AMAURY

Often, perhaps;

I am not skilled to tell; but never these.

(returning to her)

They are of trouble known.

YOLANDA

Yet now forget them.

AMAURY

It will not leave my heart that somehow—how
I cannot fathom—Camarin of Paphos—

YOLANDA

(lightly)

Ah, no!

AMAURY

That he, the Paphian, has caused them.
Tell me—

YOLANDA

That I love you? Oh, I do—

(gaily)

As sea the sky, and as the sky the wind,
And as the wind the forest, and as the forest—
What does the forest love, Amaury? I
Can think of nothing?

AMAURY

(fixedly) You have never, then,
Yielded for even a brief moment to him?
Never have let him touch these hands too long?
Or gazed once too deeply into these eyes
Till evermore he must—even as I?
You falter? darken?

YOLANDA

(grimly) Would he had never come
Into these walls! That it were beautiful,
Holy, to hate him—as the lost can hate!
Or even as—

AMAURY

You cannot?

YOLANDA

. . . May God judge him!
(She is standing by the cross-shaped candle-
stick, staring at it, and crossing herself)

BERENGERE

(who reenters)

Amaury, a soldier has come from Keryneia,
And wishes to have a word with you alone.

AMAURY

(startled)

From Keryneia?

BERENGERE

Spent. It is ill news?
I've seen that battle-light in you before.

You must ride back again into the peril
You've come from?

AMAURY

Did he bring any token?

BERENGERE

A single gilded spur.

AMAURY

They mean to land then!

YOLANDA

(over the candlestick)

For an attack, upon the fort?

AMAURY

 Their galleys
Are waiting to anchor when the wind ends.
My troops, certain of it, have sent for me.
I must return at once.

YOLANDA

(suddenly) I pray you, do not!

AMAURY

(astonished)

Yolanda?

YOLANDA

If I am left alone . . . now!

AMAURY

Why, this is strange. What is it?

YOLANDA

I do not know.

A breath of fear only. It escaped me.
Go, and forget.

AMAURY

 I will remember only
Your lips, and your beauty, and your love.
 (he kisses her, turns away, and is gone)

BERENGERE

(after a pause, perturbed)
I am less apt than he at forgetting.
Why, my child, did you—?

YOLANDA

I must sleep, mother.

BERENGERE

A difference, a change, has come over you,
Drawn as a veil between us.

YOLANDA

I am weary.

BERENGERE

You love me?

YOLANDA

Even, mother, as I love him,
With love impregnable to every ill,
As Paradise is.

BERENGERE

Then—

YOLANDA

No more, please, now.
Tonight I am flooded with a deeper tide
Than yet has surged into my life—and through it
Sounds premonition—so I must have calm.
(Goes)

BERENGERE

(turning slowly)

What fear—if it is fear—has so unfixed her?

(Beginning to wander about)

Is it suspicion? . . . Then I must not meet
Him here again tonight . . . or no more.
Her premonition wakes again my dream
Of bringing bitterness on her with a cross.
(Thinks, then takes a crucifix from her neck)

Had Renier but come perhaps I might . . .
 Oh were I dead this sinning would awake me!
 And yet . . . I do not care. I will forget.

(Lays the crucifix down and goes to the doors. Finding all clear, she takes up the candlestick. Unaware of its shape she waves it at the loggia. Then, reassuring herself)

Soon he will come up from the cool and touch
 Away my weakness with mad tenderness.
 Soon he will bring . . . (Aware now) Ah, the cross!
 my dream!

(Half letting it fall)

Mercy of God, save me! . . . Sacrilege!
 (Sets it down and sinks to the couch in dread)

CAMARIN

(appearing)

My Berengere . . . I've mounted on the beam.
 (After locking the grating he comes down speaking low)

BERENGERE

(at his touch)

No, no! never again; . . . now—nor ever!
 Go from me and behind leave no farewell.

CAMARIN

From you? now? . . . In the dew I have waited
 And the night's song of you is in my brain,
 A song that seems—

BERENGERE

The cross—that candlestick!
 I waved to you with it, at the loggia.
 Leave me and let me pass out of this sin,
 And to repentance after.

CAMARIN

Before a word,
 A kiss, or a caress? . . . Ah, I cannot!

BERENGERE

But must, for our safety, if naught else.
 This moment, were it known, would end in murder.
 Or did it not, dishonor still would kill.

CAMARIN

And yet I cannot now—famished for love.
 Tomorrow, but not tonight! . . .
 Give me your being once again, your beauty:
 For it I'm mad, as bacchanals for wine.
 (Sitting down by her, recklessly)
 Let us again take rapture wings and rise
 Up to our star of love fate would unsphere.
 (A cloaked FORM appears at the grating)
 Let us live over days that passed as limpid
 As streams by lotos banks down to the sea;
 Over all whispered nights that we have clasped,
 Knowing the heights and all the deeps of passion.
 (YOLANDA appears on the balcony)
 But speak and we shall be amid the stars.
 (The cloaked FORM draws a dagger and vanishes.
 YOLANDA suppressing a cry comes down trembling.
 The TWO spring up)

BERENGERE

You here? and not asleep?

YOLANDA

Mother . . . Oh!

His eyes!

BERENGERE

Whose? . . . Why are you spying on me?

YOLANDA

Lord Renier's . . . at the grating there. I saw him
 And came back to warn you.

BERENGERE

Renier's?

YOLANDA

He peered through, listening frenziedly—
And then unsheathed his dagger.

BERENGERE

(in terror)

Camarin,

He will come back, some other way, with murder.
I cannot die, Yolanda, I cannot,
Unshriven here, and sullied.

YOLANDA

No . . . Perhaps

His purpose was not that—or if so—

BERENGERE

(unable to stand, sitting)

My flesh is weak, impoverished by guilt—
As all my soul is.

YOLANDA

Something can be done.

(Camarin goes to the curtains and returns)

BERENGERE

The shame! the disgrace! . . . Yolanda, save me;
You alone can, I think, if any can.
Would he believe, could he—that in what
He saw he was deceived?

YOLANDA

(thinking)

He was angry,

And since it was dim here, and your face
Was turned away . . . No, he'd not believe it,
Unless—

BERENGERE

Oh what? You see a way—some way?

YOLANDA

(still thinking)

He came after your words—and not before them,
And, since his eyes are weak and trouble him,

May only have heard Sir Camarin . . .

(Her thoughts taking shape)

Go to your room, mother, and be asleep—

BERENGERE

I cannot die, now.

YOLANDA

As if asleep.

(Leading her off)

Go quickly; for if the way I shall attempt

Is one that I can walk unfalteringly—

CAMARIN

(as YOLANDA returns)

What do you purpose?

YOLANDA

At the desperate depths

Of destiny to which your love has brought her

To take her place—here within your arms.

CAMARIN

I do not see your meaning.

YOLANDA

You shall—at once.

Lord Renier must believe, till she is safe,

That I, not she, have been unhallowed by you.

Therefore take me into your arms, clasp me,

And breathe me thirst as of unbounded love,

Though I shall stifle with each word of it.

Quickly, for he will come!

CAMARIN

This is folly!

YOLANDA

Begin!

CAMARIN

Folly, I say. He'll not believe it.

(Impelled, however, as RENIER enters with MORO)

With all my body—and soul-breath—I love you.
 Let us give all this night to ecstasy.
 Kiss me with quenchless kisses—and embrace me
 With all your beauty—

YOLANDA

(breaking away) No! . . . Lord Renier!
 (Covers her face, both in fear and to deceive him, as he approaches
 with drawn dagger)

MORO

(recognizing her)
 My lord, hold! Hold! It is Yolanda!
 (Has grasped his arm)
 Hold, I say!

RENIER

(staring) Then . . . why then . . . Amaury!
 (Shaken, confused, he lets the dagger fall and goes, past CAMARIN,
 who has drawn his sword. YOLANDA, trembling, sobbing, sinks
 to the divan)

CURTAIN

ACT II

Several days have elapsed

SCENE: The forecourt of the castle, beyond which is the garden, and in the distance the mountains under the deep tropical blue of morning. On the right the wall enclosing the castle grounds runs back and is lost in the foliage of cypress and palm. It is pierced by an arched gate with lifted portcullis. On the left rises the dark front of the castle, its arabesqued doorway open. Across the rear a low arcaded screen of masonry, with an entrance right, separated the court from the garden. Before it a fountain, guarded by a statue of a Knight of Saint John, falls into a porphyry basin. By the castle door, to the front, and elsewhere, are seats.

HASSAN is standing moodily by the screen, left, looking toward the gate. He starts, hearing steps, and as the old leech TREMITUS enters, motions him silently into the castle; then muttering "the old blood-letter," he stands as before, while CIVA, MAGA, and MAURIA, heard in the garden, enter gaily bearing water jars. CIVA sees his look and breaks into twittering laughter. The other two join her.

CIVA

Look at him, Maga, Mauria! Behold!
Was ever sight so sweet upon the world?
Is he not very joy?

MAURIA

Now is he not!
With the price of vinegar upon his face!

CIVA

The price of vinegar! A-ho! who'll buy?
(As all laugh)
Not I! Not I! Not I!

HASSAN

(scornfully) Itching woman!

CIVA

And not a man? Hear him, Mauria!
I'm not a man! He has discovered it!
(Laughs again, flicking her skirt. Then solemnly:)
But see him now—a mummy of the Nile
Who died of choler!

MAURIA

Have a care, he'll bite!
He's been in the grave a long while and he's hungry.
Get him a barley loaf, quickly, Maga!
Quickly! get it quickly!

CIVA

To appease him!
Or no, hist! He's thinking—and not hungry.
(In mock awe)
What does he think of?

MAURIA

Sphinxes and the spheres!

CIVA

Or little ants and gnats that buzz about him!

MAURIA

Or of Alessa—whom he tries to ogle!

MAGA

No, Civa: cease teasing. He is troubled,
As we are, by this talk of Lady Yolanda,
And waits for Lord Amaury from the battle.

CIVA

(knowingly)

Does he now? from the battle? *does* he?
How is it then—

HASSAN

(roiled) Silence, scandal-lice,

Wherever Lord Amaury is or is not.

And as to Lady Yolanda, tie your tongues

In six knots concerning her, all of you.

(CIVA flouts him and turns away to the fountain. YOLANDA appears from the castle—ALESSA with her. MAGA, MAURIA and CIVA fill their jars and go, humming. YOLANDA comes down)

YOLANDA

My want is still the same, Hassan.

HASSAN

(loathly)

For news?

Of Lord Amaury?

YOLANDA

He has not returned?

HASSAN

(evasively)

I have not seen him, lady.

YOLANDA

Nor heard, either,

Whether the battle's over?

HASSAN

Nothing surely.

(To himself)

Liar that I am to say it.

YOLANDA

What has kept him?

(Goes to the gate)

The Saracens were routed to their vessels
 Last night—all the Allah-crying horde.
 And it is known, too, that he rode
 Into the battle as a seraph might
 To the Holy Sepulchre's deliverance.
 And yet—no word from him!

HASSAN

(sourly)

Perhaps with reason.

YOLANDA

With . . . reason?

HASSAN

If what's rumored here of you
 And that accursed Paphian is true!

YOLANDA

(austerely)

And who rumors it? who has set the hounds
 Of rumor on?

HASSAN

The women, with their ears
 Ever at secrecy—or some of them.
 Yet if it is not true, if this Camarin,
 A prinker, whose purse is daily loose to us,
 Has injured you, I've wounds to salve too.
 My mother's ten years dead, as you know,
 And flower lips breathe innocent above her;
 But she was stained once, by his father—
 And waits to be avenged.

YOLANDA

And that avenging

Would wait to be avenged! No. Come here.
 Look in my eyes deeply. Do you see there
 Desire of murder? Do you? (As he falters) Then remember
 We owe pity rather than hate to sin;

For many who love may stray, it seems, beyond
The justice of our judging.

HASSAN

(chagrined)

... I would serve you.

YOLANDA

With murder? No, I say. But if indeed
You would, as in the past—

HASSAN

Lady, I will.

YOLANDA

Watch the Venetian then, and her slave,
And when Amaury comes, seek me out,
For ... What was that? A bugle? ... It is, Alessa!
It is, oh listen! and surely is Amaury's!
The silver chime of it! I breathe again,
My heart as a bird in May! ... Let us go out
At once—from the gate—out to meet him
Before any have—

ALESSA

You forget, lady.

He does not know yet—

YOLANDA

He shall, quickly!

ALESSA

And will you tell him what has happened? Can you?

YOLANDA

When I have seen him I shall know—or if
I do not I can warn him that a fever
Is here that he must fend his ear from.
Oh I must see him again and hear again
The music of his lips,
Hang on his battle-story blessedly!

(Suddenly changing)

But why, Hassan, do you stand as stone?
You know something? ... What? ... He is dead?
And never may come again? never? ... Is he?

HASSAN

I'll lie to you no longer, lady, though
Thrice bidden to—if I value life.
It is not true that Lord Amaury's still
At battle.

YOLANDA

Then, where is he? . . . and how is he?

HASSAN

He came last night at dusk and was led
Up to his chamber secretly,—as was
Commanded by Lord Renier.

ALESSA

(clawingly) And you've kept
This from me, toad, till now? Ha, you have?

HASSAN

Now, woman—

ALESSA

Though you boasted love to me?

(To YOLANDA)

He does, lady, repeating like a parrot
Vows and amorous oaths! . . . And he'd kill
The Paphian too! Ha!

HASSAN

By God, I would!

ALESSA

With dust, worm, heeling away from him?

YOLANDA

Be still, both. Words like these can wait
On what may yet be helped. To me first
His word should have come of this, for I—

(She stops: VITTIA has entered. A moment's pause)

ALESSA

(at a glance from YOLANDA)

I will go in, lady.

HASSAN

(following loathly) And I—to wait—
Until there's need.

YOLANDA

(turning suddenly) And I, Venetian—
To find Amaury!

VITTIA

(startled) To find—?

YOLANDA

He came last night,
As you and Lord Renier are aware.
What have you told him? Where is he, and who
Is with him?

VITTIA

(mockingly) He was bidden to sleep late
And have no evil dreams—since all is well
In Lusignan—now.

YOLANDA

Innocent mocker!

(BERENGERE enters)

But do not think it will avail. I mean
To go to him myself.

VITTIA

And be repelled?

YOLANDA

If he could trust you. But he could not—

VITTIA

Knowing

Your Camarin, as well as Aphrodite,
Was born at Paphos?

YOLANDA

Mother, you hear? Shall this—?

BERENGERE

She has not told him anything, Yolanda.
 I too have been aware and kept you blind,
 For he was overweary, and his wound—

YOLANDA

Wound? . . . He is wounded?

BERENGERE

In no peril,

If the leech Tremitus has any skill,
 And that he has, you know.

YOLANDA

(deeply moved)

Then, Madonna,

(Crossing herself)

I thank thee! . . . and never at any altar
 Will fail to lay thank offerings and alms.

(To BERENGERE, for VITTIA turns and goes)

But you, mother, who have kept this from me
 Unkindly thus, why do you still delay
 To tell Lord Renier all, as you've promised,
 And beg forgiveness? He would be lenient
 For his own sake, preferring that to shame
 Or murder. Then with Camarin sent away
 Amaury need know nothing. Mother—

BERENGERE

Do not

Again call me so; I cannot tell him.

YOLANDA

(bitterly)

But can, without qualm, leave me helpless
 Within this gulf's dishonor—which the Venetian
 May flood with other evils not to be stemmed?
 Will you at least not seek to pledge Lord Renier
 Against any disclosure to Amaury?

BERENGERE

I cannot . . . and I will not.

YOLANDA

(proudly)

Then for me

One course is inevitably left.

I too am a woman, and the woman wants,

The beauty and ache and dream and glow and urge

Of an unreckoned love are mine, as yours.

I will not lose Amaury, whatever refusal

To do so may bring.

BERENGERE

(with dread)

Camarin then

Must take me away to safety—at once . . .

To some retreat!

YOLANDA

Where still pursuit would follow,

Even, I fear, Amaury's vengefully?

And overtake you though you fled as far

As the sea foams—or past the sandy wastes

Of Africa? . . . No, that is a hope—

(RENIER appears in the castle door. She ceases. He scans both
but comes down addressing BERENGERE)

RENIER

She troubles you too much.

BERENGERE

My lord—?

RENIER

This girl.

You cherish her—and reap unchastity

For gratitude, unchastity against

Our very son who was betrothed to her.

Yet see her unashamed.

BERENGERE

(dully)

I think you wrong her.

(YOLANDA turns away)

RENIER

Your kindness and concern cannot veil her.
The convent and a crucifix once more
And counting senseless beads in a round
Remote were better for her.—But what more now
Is she demanding?

BERENGERE

. . . Little.

RENIER

Not the means

Still to deceive Amaury?

BERENGERE

Renier, no.

(loathly)

But I have a request that, if you grant,
May draw this threatening fang of fate from us
And bring quiet and peace.

RENIER

(consideringly)

And we two then
Might be once more as those who wed and love?

BERENGERE

Perhaps.

RENIER

(wistfully) As those who love? Granted then.
But first I have a confession.

BERENGERE

You? . . . to me?

RENIER

(taking her hand)

Before I found Yolanda on the breast
Of Camarin of Paphos—days before—
I suffered in the furnace of suspicion
That you were the guilty one—you my own wife.
(As she shrinks)

I did—dishonoringly! . . . So it is just
 That you shrink back, even as now you do,
 From stain upon your wedded constancy.
 For shriving time, I know, must lapse before
 You'll grant me full forgiveness. When it has
 I'll hope to win you as erewhile I have not.—
 Now, the request.

BERENGERE

. . . That now I cannot plead.

(as YOLANDA hardens)

And yet, I must . . . It is, Renier,
 That for a while Amaury may not know
 This ashen shame that has fallen on
 Yolanda from a meteor night of evil.

RENIER

(staring)

Not know—? He not know it? he—?

BERENGERE

Trust me!

RENIER

And to this wanton's perfidy still
 To bind him to her, with some charm perhaps,
 Or even past releasing with a philtre?
 Already he holds her purer than a spirit
 Sped from the fields of Immortality
 To be his bride. Then would he—?

YOLANDA

Sir, hear us.

She does not ask, now, that I shall wed him,
 But only that you do not separate us
 With . . . my unhappy shame; that you will wait
 Till I can chill his passion with the pall
 Of some cloudy excuse. For I crave
 But one thing now—innocence in his sight.
 Oh, sir, believe—

RENIER

I will—that you are mad.
 Yet madder should I be, if my brain
 Were blind to such murk.

YOLANDA

(gravely) As it will be
 Perhaps to a worse and wider gloom
 If now you overwhelm me! . . . Sir, do not.
 (As he half wavers)
 There's more than tenderness in you—somewhere.
 I touched it once—with orange blossoms laid
 Upon your pillow—when you chafed in fever.
 You took my hand then, as might a father . . .
 And once too, when by the sea at night
 I sang, knowing not why, of lost delights,
 Of vanished roses whose remembered hues
 Recall May to the world, you came silently
 And lifted up my brow to your kiss.
 Will you not then—?

RENIER

(voidly) Such cunning and enticing
 Cannot avail twice. With it doubtless,
 Or with a lure as rare, you wove a mesh
 About Amaury—until he could not move
 Or see beyond you.

YOLANDA

For his sake I ask it.

RENIER

For no sake but to sway him with your eyes
 And hair—that he foolishly believes
 An aureole from Heaven.

BERENGERE

But if he—

RENIER

You screen her, my Berengere. Therefore
 It grieves me much, since I desire your peace.

BERENGERE

Never have you, but have only desired
To break it.

RENIER

(harshly) Half I fear then that I should.
There's midnight in this thing and mystery.
Does she not love Camarin?

YOLANDA

(quickly) Say no more, sir.
Let her entreaty pass.

RENIER

That brings you low—
But brings to me no light—only again
A stumbling in suspicion.

YOLANDA

Needlessly!

RENIER

(after a long stare)
Tomorrow then, unless Amaury runs
Fitting revenge through Camarin of Paphos,
Your lover, you shall clasp him openly
Before all in Lusignan.

YOLANDA

(shrinking) No! . . . no, no!
Rather instead death—or banishment!

RENIER

You disavow him then? You . . . ?

BERENGERE

Renier!

Only her lips do so, desperately.
The unaccustomed wind of these ill hours
Has torn tranquility from her, and reason.

YOLANDA

Sir, yes, reason and peace.

RENIER

We shall see—

Without delay. I'll send her Camarin.
 (He goes, looking back at them)

YOLANDA

(premonitively)

Mother, I fear him!

BERENGERE

Life is ever fear.

No step was ever taken in the world
 But from a brink of danger, or in flight
 From happiness that seems too often sin.
 (Sitting down)

It sickens me.

YOLANDA

(alarmed) Mother!

BERENGERE

Nothing . . . a pain

Here in my breast.

YOLANDA

(bitterly) A pain caused by a shame
 Inflicted by a guest—who first came
 Into this house showing a chivalry
 That he had learned too well in other lands!
 A shame he has not lifted a hand to heal.
 (BERENGERE has no answer. CAMARIN enters)

YOLANDA

(as he greets them)

Your bow, sir, and courtesy, though flawless,
 Seem but derision to our misery.
 Our days here were gentle once, and kind,
 But you have made each moment's beat of them
 A blow upon the breast! For the dear honor
 And innocence, once ours, now lie bleeding
 Upon an altar of shame—a sacrifice
 That pain cannot consume.

CAMARIN

(depressedly) As all too late
And leadenly I see.

YOLANDA

But without tender
Of aid for it? you who seemed so versed
In all the world's artful wiles and ways?.

CAMARIN

By brain's an arid waste, under remorse,
Save for one verdant thing—the love of her
My love has so unhallowed.

YOLANDA

And for that

I'm still to suffer in silence? No defense
When it is told Amaury that I, he once
Imbued with fondest faith and betrothal,
Chose as the planet mate of his proud star,
Was found within your arms, upon your breast . . .
The memory is fire, whose flame I'll not
Endure an hour longer.

CAMARIN

Tonight you must,
Or through tomorrow, when I shall find means
For Berengere to slip away to safety.

BERENGERE

And penitence! For that too, Yolanda.

CAMARIN

Suspicion and the peril feet of shame
Must be kept from her still.

YOLANDA

Though driven over

My heart they trample the lone flower of hope?
No. Even now, upon his bed perhaps,
Amaury hears and shrinks from me.

CAMARIN

(staring)

Amaury?

At Keryneia? How?

YOLANDA

I'll go and tell him

I'm innocent, as the first dew of Eden—

The first dawn over it!

CAMARIN

He has returned?

(HASSAN enters urgently—to YOLANDA)

HASSAN

Lady—

YOLANDA

I know of Amaury's wound, Hassan.

What more? Have they told him?

HASSAN

The Venetian,

Who tended him last night, pouring his potions.

They broke his sleep, a little since and made

Him listen—as he did in a daze.

But when they subtly urged him to vow an oath

Against you—not to see you, he rose up

And unleashed the strength of his suffering.

I think he means to come here.

BERENGERE

(appealingly)

Yolanda!

Can we not flee, Camarin? Oh, what—?

(Perturbed voices approach, doubling her fear. AMAURY entering pushes down to YOLANDA. RENIER, VITTIA and TREMITUS seek to restrain him. ALESSA and others slip in)

AMAURY

(his throat bandaged)

I'll not return again to my couch,

Though twice these wounds and all your wants urge it.

Never will I, Yolanda, till they learn
That any word's unchastity against you,
Whom I again enfold here in my arms,
Means more than any peril.

TREMITUS

(woefully)

But my physic—!

AMAURY

Until I prove past a doubt to them
That you—who are purity, if Mary
Is Mother of God and light of Paradise—
That you, in whose presence I am purged
As in a tidal sea of angel song,
Are stainless and unstainable to my eyes,
As is the sacring bell to holy ears . . .
So undefiled that even a perfect lily
Upon your breast might fear to pollute it:
Until I prove . . . Ah, a fool, a fool
Would know it's unbelievable—and laugh.

RENIER

As now a fool is doing?

AMAURY

Oh, sir, you,
My father, must be pardoned for believing
This monster breath against her chastity,
As must your guest, this lady of the Pisani,
Who last night gently nursed me.
But you are mired, all of you, in the maze
Of some delusion, which you must dispel.
I mean now to forget it.

TREMITUS

(approvingly)

Aie!

RENIER

Off, leech!

Off, with your smelly physic!—Let him forget it,
If so he can—as mongrel dogs do
The lash, in hunger of the wonted bone!

AMAURY

I cannot be inoculated, sir,
 Against her with a poison so perverted:
 Trust in my veins makes of it but more truth.
 And to affirm my further faith in her
 I'll clasp the hand of him accused with her.

VITTIA

(ironically)

Do, Amaury, and embrace him too,
 As *she* did three nights ago.

YOLANDA

(low)

Venetian!

AMAURY

To all, my Yolanda, who harbor
 Distrust of you, my reply is:
 There is my mother, see, strangely wounded
 By wonder and pain and pity of this plight.
 You have dwelt by her here, as the fawn
 By the white doe on Mount Chionodes.
 I would as soon believe that she had given
 Her motherhood to such contamination
 As that—

YOLANDA

Amaury!

AMAURY

As that even a moment—

YOLANDA

Let us have done, Amaury, with this delirium!
 Be deaf to it, as to a taunt of doom,
 In triple mail and granite against even
 Its memory!
 Say that we can—and now.

RENIER

So that you

May lure him yet to wed you?

AMAURY

(restrainingly) Sir!

She would—

RENIER

If left to it.

YOLANDA

(humbly) Lord Renier, I would go,
At your command, to any alien air,
To lonely India, a lost sea isle,
To the last peak of arid Caucasus,
If doing so would clear this evil away.

RENIER

With Camarin of Paphos?

YOLANDA

With whoever—

RENIER

With Camarin, I say?

AMAURY

You drive and drain her

Of any will, sir, or free decision.
To me let her answer . . . For, Yolanda,
I've striven overlong to unloose
The heavy hydra of falsity that rumor
Has wound about you. More is needed for it.
If you have sown any unseemly tare
Upon the April vision of our love,
Or if it has been sown by any other,
Reveal it, that at once we may uproot
And thrust it away.

YOLANDA

(helpless) Amaury . . . !

RENIER

. . . She is silent,

And cannot: your appealing, too, is fruitless.
But ask her this, whether three nights ago—

AMAURY

I'll not so insult her!

RENIER

Does she hurl

A hot disavowal against the hint

I offer you?

AMAURY

(numbly) Stand away from her.

I'll speak to her alone.

YOLANDA

(gladly)

And then judge,

Amaury! For one look into my eyes

Will free you of—

RENIER

The will to resist you?

YOLANDA

I'll not suffer this contempt longer.

AMAURY

Nor I longer to breathe the stifling mist

Of this untoward accusal. For this wound

Upon my throat, Yolanda, should not thus

Be fevered with such doubt. So I ask you—

BERENGERE

(agitatedly)

I am not well, Renier, and need

Yolanda. Let her come with me.

RENIER

Not until

She grants that I found her in the arms

Of Camarin, drinking from his lips

The hot quick frenzied wine of passion

He poured her. She is powerless to deny it,

Or he, or any . . .

YOLANDA

Amaury . . . it is true.

(Then seeing the shock of her words)

But do not think I have been faithless to you,
Though I was in his arms; that for a moment,
The least moment's while, I was forgetful
Of the divinity of love high-altared
Here in my breast—of the immutable
Beauty of it . . . Ah do, do not look so—
As if I had struck, murdered, a little child, /
Or palsied one who put a hand to help me,
Or through eternity had desecrated,
Vainly, all virginity and love.
What I have done I did—

CAMARIN

(starting)

Tremitus, quickly!

Look quickly to Lady Berengere. She's fainting.
Where are the women?

YOLANDA

(in despair) Ah . . . what shall I do!

(The WOMEN lead BERENGERE off. RENIER twitches.

AMAURY groans, then crosses over to HASSAN. Taking his sword he turns hoarsely to CAMARIN)

AMAURY

The day you first set foot in Lusignan
An image of the Magdalen within
The chapel yonder fell—presaging this.
Only your death or mine now stands pale
Between us . . . waiting silently.
Draw, and at once.

CAMARIN

I'll not, for a mischance

You do not understand.

AMAURY

Lecherous liar,

Out with your skulking sword.

CAMARIN

I'll add no more

To the guilt I bear, or to the misery
In which we are entangled.

AMAURY

(pricking him)

Then, by God,

I'll split its sheath—and make its tongue defend you.

CAMARIN

So be it. (Draws)

AMAURY

Amorous cheat!

CAMARIN

If so, at least

Not yet a bloody one.

AMAURY

(chokedly)

You play a part,

The cowardly part of seeming penitence,
In hopes of living still, lustfully,
Upon the love you've stolen.

CAMARIN

No, young fool.

Nor will I live remorseless on your folly.

Therefore—(Tossing his sword down) my answer is this.

AMAURY

(doing likewise)

And mine this!

Yet you shall not escape, for I will take
Your leper throat into my hands and strangle it,
Or crush it as a viper under heel.
For the same sky you breathe . . . I will not.
The sun falling upon us shall not foul
The earth with your shadow. You shall die,
Though I must go down into Hell for it.

(He has started toward CAMARIN but stops, clasping his throat)

YOLANDA

(as he suddenly drops to his knees)

His wound! . . . Oh, quick, quick!

TREMITUS

My precious physic,

All wasted . . .!

YOLANDA

Bear him in!

AMAURY

Stand away!

(Pushes her off and rises)

I too believe you pure as my own mother!

YOLANDA

Amaury! . . .

AMAURY

I too believe . . . to suppose . . .

VITTIA

(going to him)

Come in, Amaury. Your wound needs instant care.

You should have trusted me.

AMAURY

(slowly)

Since chastity's

A myth, I should have trusted any dream

Of Hell rather than this.

VITTIA

My plan was best.

Why hesitate still, then, to assent?

AMAURY

(with low vehemence)

It shall be done—today or tomorrow.

Then let there be an end.

YOLANDA

(with tense concern) What plan, Amaury—?
 What is it you intend with her against me?
 (As he merely goes)
 What is it you intend?

VITTIA

(low) You are to wed
 Your lover of Paphos, who no doubt is willing,
 Then leave the castle at once—as is decent.

YOLANDA

(YOLANDA tries to laugh, scornfully. But RENIER'S eyes are fixed fiercely upon her. Turning, helpless, she hurries into the garden.)

CURTAIN

ACT III

The Same Day

SCENE: The hall and loggia of Act I, but toward sunset. On the flushed sea without fisherboats are seen returning to shore and in the left distance a portion of Famagouste rises above the waves—with its semi-Oriental walls, towers and domes interspersed with tall palms.

The interior of the Hall is the same except for the divan, which is placed to the left front, and the lectern, which is near the balcony leading to the sleeping apartments and chapel.

SMARDA is lying lithely on the divan idly beguiled with her charms and amulets, and from time to time giving a low sinuous laugh. VITTIA enters thoughtful, watches a moment, then advances.

VITTIA

Smarda—

SMARDA

Lady, your slave! (Springs up)

VITTIA

I think you are—

If ever the leopard yields.

SMARDA

To you, lady?

To your commands? Let him but dare refuse
And he will learn! . . . What would you have of me?

VITTIA

Requital, first, for you.

SMARDA

(avidly)

Give it! Give it!

Into my hand!

VITTIA

When you have heard my purpose.

SMARDA

(kneeling)

Your slave listens.

VITTIA

Those amulets you wear

Upon your wrists . . .

SMARDA

Of jade and sard, lady,
To bring revenge. From Scythia, my home
They came with me.

VITTIA

The home from which Abdullah,
Your Moorish master, tore you.

SMARDA

(with hate)

The spirits strangle him!

VITTIA

If I achieve what I intend tonight
You shall have gold for weightier spells upon him.

SMARDA

(gleaming)

Gold, lady? . . . Gold?

VITTIA

For any sorcery.

But not until this wedding is compelled.

The Paphian is willing, for he hopes

To escape then with Berengere. Yolanda

Is not. She still foils it. But there's news:

A ship has come from Venice.

SMARDA

(quickly)

Pietro?

With papers?

VITTIA

From the Senate, as I think;

And with full powers.

SMARDA

Ha!—fortune's touch!

VITTIA

It is, but tardy. So without delay

I must obtain them.

SMARDA

From him? when he comes?

I'll see to it, lady—he shall not dally

A moment at the gate, or in the kitchen,

To drink and vaunt of love.

VITTIA

As he will,

With peacock boasting, doubtless, if unhindered.

You'll find me, when he comes, with Lord Amaury,

Whose mood's unsettled. For but a little since,

Seeing his father's look fix too strangely

Upon his mother, he turned away from me,

After I was compelled to requicken

Lord Renier's distrust of his wife,

Rather than of Yolanda.

SMARDA

I see, lady.

VITTIA

Slip to the gate, then, and watch for Pietro.
(She goes)

SMARDA

(itchingly)

Gold! for weightier witcheries upon him!
(Begins to dance and laugh, holding a charm up)

Gold! for spells and charms and witcheries!
(She sways and chants, whirling faster the while—till a laugh at the curtains checks her. It is CIVA, who pushes PIETRO in, then vanishes)

PIETRO

(looking after her)

Stay, pretty wench! Cyprian! listen to me!
I'm Pietro of Venice!

SMARDA

(low)

Ha! . . . it is!

The peacock, with his tail spread as ever!

PIETRO

(half hearing—turning)

Slave, you? . . . I give you greeting.

SMARDA

(with mock deference) Greeting!

PIETRO

(smugly)

I see that you remember me.

SMARDA

Pietro?

The trusty servant of so many lords
And high ladies of Venice?

PIETRO

I am called so.

SMARDA

The hope and handsome passion of so many
Whose petticoats sweep palaces and kitchens?

(As her irony penetrates)

What were you sent here for, peacock fool?
To preen thus and dally there at curtains?

PIETRO

Eh, now? . . .

SMARDA

Will my lady hear with gratitude
Your wenching with the Cyprian, while she
Is waiting for the papers?

PIETRO

(in alarm)

Slave, she must not!

(Searches for the papers)

SMARDA

Ha!

PIETRO

You must take them in to her at once!
And say that in spite of being stopt
And questioned by the Cyprian you saw—
Who fell enamoured of me at the gate—
Where too a lady swooned as I came in—

SMARDA

(aquiver instantly)

As you—came in? swooned?

PIETRO

By the fountain

Where she—

SMARDA

Who? What lady? Which? A young one?
Or was it the older, Lady Berengere?
Did no one say?—Quick, give me the papers!
(Snatches them)

My mistress must be told of this, at once.

(She goes, leaving him open-mouthed and dazed)

(He follows her out. The sunset deepens, slowly. AMAURY enters, brooding, expectant, perturbed)

AMAURY

(finding no one)

Not here yet? . . . There's more in this than seems;

Yet, with so much known, why should I doubt?

(He toys with a finger-ring unconsciously. Then sits down to wait, still brooding)

VITTIA enters. He rises and continues):

I'm here again at your request, lady,

As when at noon you called me from the garden.

What more have you to say to me?

VITTIA

(hesitantly)

My lord—

AMAURY

Yolanda in confessing has but left

A cloud of more uncertainty about her.

It presses deeper than night upon my peace.

And at my father's look, too, you have seen

Fear spring in my mother.

VITTIA

. . . All too swiftly.

AMAURY

But do not wonder?

VITTIA

When I know its source?

(Half inviting him to sit by her)

No need, my lord. For though I've marked your pangs

As well, I am most sure that all will cease—

If you are firm.

AMAURY

Blindly? ignorantly?

Without reason to be?

VITTIA

(demurely) With ample reason—
But one that only another, rather than I,
Can fittingly give.

AMAURY

Than you? (Turns away)
There's none who could.

VITTIA

(skillfully)
Then it will cease, believe me, my lord—
So as a flail of doubt it should not beat
Insistently within you—when Yolanda
And Camarin are wed . . . But all else
About it, for your sake, I must withhold.

AMAURY

Though I am kept still under uncertainty
As under the hot sands of a sirocco!—
And yet you do so gently.

VITTIA

And so feel.
For surely during the night of your fever
You saw the unabashed burden of love
That filled my eyes, and heard my lips longing
To pour healing enchantment on your wounds.
(Getting no response)
But of Yolanda—

AMAURY

(hauntedly) Still I love her, still!

VITTIA

(coldly)
As she's aware—so may refuse to wed
With Camarin.

AMAURY

Which too is without reason!

VITTIA

Save one. You forget that you are Lusignan,
 Heir to a sceptred line—as he is not—
 And so may reach the throne.

AMAURY

(beliefless)

That *she* aspires to?

VITTIA

Were it a folly to make sure?

AMAURY

(impatiently)

Whatever

Her purpose . . . or her perfidy . . . may be,
 It is not ambition.

VITTIA

Yet a test of it

Would double the surety—and I offer one;
 Though it is one, in truth, whose indelicacy
 May seem to soil whatever bloom I boast.
 Let her, my lord, think—but for a day—
 You've chosen to wed me—

AMAURY

You?

VITTIA

Firmly:

Until there's final certainty:
 Then, if you wish I will return to Venice.

AMAURY

But if she still—?

VITTIA

Refuses Camarin?

Call me delusion's dolt.

AMAURY

(after a pause)

It shall be!

I'll try the issue to the end.

And as a proof of any tie soever
Between us, wear this ring, her dead father's,
And given to me as a token by her.

(Hands it)

But now, my mother—

VITTIA

Can we not, my lord,
Delay that till later? The fishing fleet
Already are on the sunset path to shore.

AMAURY

This only, then. Tomorrow—(SMARDA slips in.
She passes him all excitement)

VITTIA

Scythian! what is aquiver in you now?
(Taking the papers offered her)
These, yes—but not these only . . . What more?
(As SMARDA hesitates)
Is it of Lord Amaury?

SMARDA

Lady Berengere!

She swooned of terror at the castle gate,
And lies in danger . . . It was as she fled
Lord Renier.

AMAURY

My father . . . ?

SMARDA

Desperately.

And you, sir, are sought below, it's said,
By officers and men from Famagouste.
(AMAURY goes bewilderedly)

VITTIA

(uncertain, then):
This is again fortune!

SMARDA

Lady—?

VITTIA

Yes!

Though but a moment since it seemed disaster.

SMARDA

Tell how!

VITTIA

Where is Yolanda? Does she know?

SMARDA

At noon she went to the high rocks—to suffer.
I watched her there amid the windy gulls,
But now she is coming here.

VITTIA

Unaware then!

As Camarin is too perhaps! . . . Go find him,
In the cypress arbor. Tell him quietly,
The loggia at once.

SMARDA

(keen for it) To come at once!
(Is off, but meets YOLANDA entering. An awkward pause, then
the slave slips on out)

VITTIA

(as YOLANDA comes down)

My gratitude! I wished—and you are here.

YOLANDA

And, for some reason of less honor, you.

VITTIA

That to a guest? Fie!

YOLANDA

To one these walls
Would loathe aloud and banish, had they a tongue.

VITTIA

And yet, ere all is done, not you but I
Shall govern them.

YOLANDA

Or find that God has opened
A gulf before your feet, to prevent it.

VITTIA

A prophecy?

YOLANDA

One deeper than disdain.

VITTIA

Or than your love of Camarin of Paphos?

YOLANDA

Which you would like to feign but cannot.

VITTIA

When quite sure you tonight shall be his wife?
Need I,

YOLANDA

(darkly)

Tonight, ere that happens, all Lusignan
Shall spew contempt on Vittia Pisani.

VITTIA

(half daunted)

On me? Pah! Unless you mean
That you will tell,—
After Lord Renier is pledged to lenience.
Or is it your intent that Berengere
And her enamored Paphian shall flee first?
If so, you are too late!

YOLANDA

You have already . . .
Hindered by some heartless treachery?

VITTIA

With fate as an ally, why trouble to?
Her guilty wings are flightless. She is ill,
Perhaps even to death.

YOLANDA

No! . . . No, no!

VITTIA

And you alone, she knows, can keep it from her—
By draining away the terror of her husband.

YOLANDA

Which would have sunk long ago had you
Not roused it up subtly!

VITTIA

But as surely

Will never do so now, until you clear
Her innocence of the least mote of doubt,
Make it seemingly virgin as your own,
By wedding Camarin.

YOLANDA

(wretchedly) And also make
Amaury cease—?

VITTIA

To grieve for you? He has.

(Shrugging and showing the ring)
As this, I think, will witness, past dispute.

YOLANDA

(at first beliefless)
My father's ring?

VITTIA

Has it a twin like it?

YOLANDA

My dead, adored father's, desecrated?
(Turning on her)
Merciless woman, for your own designs
You shall no longer use artfully
The pity I indulged to spare another!
To shatter past all season of recovery

The love Amaury had for me! My veins
 Are drained now, at last, of all weakness;
 Are empty of submission, cold and numb
 To every plea or threat of it. I'll thrust
 The burden of this torture back upon you
 And upon her! If she dies of it
 The guilt—shall be yours!

VITTIA

(less confidently) Ha!

YOLANDA

And the shame!

(Compellingly)

Nor will her sin—for she has sinned—excuse
 Your murder of her, as your face betrays;
 For even now you hear, at the dim gate
 Guarding your soul's peace, the phantom cries
 Of hot remorse, the hidden hungry thrust
 And presage beat of them like reaching hands.
 All that I could to spare her I have done,
 All that was duty and of love the most.
 But it was you who first kindled the fire
 Of cruel suspicion in Lord Renier,
 And it is you who now must still his doubt,
 And stay the ebb of her despairing spirit,
 By penitently going to persuade him
 That it was but a grave and grievous folly
 Of you—and of him—to suspect her.

(As VITTIA shrugs again)

You will?

VITTIA

And then go pray—pulingly?

(Drawing out the papers)

Instead, I have here authority
 From Venice that especially permits me
 To make Amaury captain over Cyprus—
 Or, if I will, abase him of command

In Famagouste—which I will do tonight
 Unless you wed, or seem to, the Paphian,
 And leave Lusignan with him, for ever.

(As a form appears on the loggia)

And here is Camarin now, for your answer.

YOLANDA

In league with you—wholly?

VITTIA

As with you—

Until he saw your loyalty to Berengere
 Had waned: for he intends to save his love,
 And her, by any oath of disavowal,
 If you attempt betrayal. (To CAMARIN) I have spoken.
 It now remains with you to persuade her.

(She moves away)

(CAMARIN looks at YOLANDA, then turns to VITTIA)

CAMARIN

Lady of Venice, I will not entreat
 This further kindness of her, though I crave it
 As an anchorite Heaven.

VITTIA

(flushing) Will not? . . . will not?

But at the very peak of our purpose
 Fall back? at the moment when—?

YOLANDA

(joyously) He does!

Of shame and of honor, shame and contrition!
 For though he might desire to waste the world
 For love of her his love has thus imperilled,
 He cannot ask more of me than breast
 Can bear—knowing I have already suffered
 Infection worse than fetid marshes send
 From Mesaoria. He cannot ask too
 That I should lose forever—

CAMARIN

No, Yolanda . . .

I can but leave her again, and her fear,
To your protecting pity.

YOLANDA

Pity! . . . (Bitterly) Pity?

Have I no need of pity, even as she?
What shall I have left, of joy and light
To ripple in me—if I lose Amaury?
Dawn with him was once enchanted incense,
And day, the least of earth, an ides of Heaven.
I shepherded each happy flock of waves
Running with silvery foaming there to shore,
And numbered the little leaves with laughing names
Out of my love—
And quickened the winds with quicker winds of hope
That now are spent . . . as summer waters . . .
Leaving my breast a torrent's barren bed.
Pity and still pity! . . . No, I say!

(HASSAN enters)

I'll be no more a pawned slave to pity!
But you, evil Venetian . . . Oh God . . .

(Her voice breaking)

It cannot be for this that compassion
Is put in us, to trammel and betray us!
Is there no Power to disavow and void it?

HASSAN

(advancing)

Lady, I think there is.

YOLANDA

(to herself)

Were my brain

Less weary!

HASSAN

I think there is—if you will dare.

VITTIA

What, dog, do you hint?

YOLANDA

If I will dare?

(She has sat down but rises)

I will. What? For now I have no fear,
Except the fear I may have,
If left thus defenseless.

HASSAN

This, then. Seize her:

It can be done, for I can hush her cries:
And shut her in the castle's leprous keep
Until she writes whatever word you will—
Then on a ship send her back to Venice.

CAMARIN

Mad! Venice would rise—and destroy us!

HASSAN

Or we the tyranny of Venice when
Lord Renier has heard the truth of her!

YOLANDA

(grasping the straw)

If it can be it shall be.

HASSAN

Now? At once?

VITTIA

(trembling)

Fools! what are you saying!

YOLANDA

Seize her quickly.

(HASSAN, about to do so, stops abruptly. On the balcony
BERENGERE appears, followed by RENIER. Her eyes, in a trance
of fear, turn back on him)

CAMARIN

(with distress and horror)

God! . . . sateless God!

YOLANDA

Ah, he will kill her!

(Has run to BERENGERE'S side protectingly)

Stand off, sir! Go away! . . . She is cold

And deathly pale . . . and ill. Go away!

RENIER

When she has told me.

YOLANDA

What? and to what end,

If she is murdered, if she dies?

RENIER

The truth!

YOLANDA

Can any truth that will be truly true

Be drawn out of such terror? No. And this

Is only again the mad suspicion you

Have had of her!

RENIER

It is!

YOLANDA

(rashly)

Renewed thus

Because, for three days, I have delayed

To wed with Camarin.

RENIER

(staring)

Delayed?

YOLANDA

Of shame—

Befitting shame—at having been discovered

In other arms than those of Amaury

To whom I was betrothed! And, too, because

I grieved at leaving Lusignan, my home,

Where I have dwelt as under tented love,

And where—

RENIER

This—can be?

YOLANDA

(desperately)

I am ready

To wed him now—and go with him anywhere!

Send for the priest—and for Amaury—for

Laughter and lights, music, revelry . . .

For anything you will; but not until

She is led back to bed and tranquility

Whom your cold violence has driven here.

Alessa! . . . Tremitus! . . .

(They, and many, have entered)

Lead her within—gently.

RENIER

. . . We shall see.

(To HASSAN as ALESSA advances)

Fetch me the priest—and with him Amaury.

When she has wed Camarin—

BERENGERE

I am cold.

(Shivers deliriously)

Where am I? . . . Under what pall am I lying?

What chill pall? and how long must I lie?

TREMITUS

She speaks to visions.

ALESSA

Come, lady, to bed.

(Leads her off)

TREMITUS

Thus can the blood do, tricks us utterly!

(YOLANDA stands in anguished hopelessness. HASSAN returns; with him MORO and AMAURY)

YOLANDA

(chokingly)

Speak—and tell him.

RENIER

Amaury . . . you are here
To see Yolanda wedded, as you bade,
To Camarin of Paphos. Until now,
She says, shame has withheld her. So—

AMAURY

(very pale)

Go on!

RENIER

She has at last chosen.

AMAURY

(paler)

Let it be then.

RENIER

(alarmed)

What ails you?

AMAURY

The wound again . . . Let it be!
And that it may be quickly, here are all
The vows and remembrances she gave me.
(Takes out a packet)
I shall aspire soon not to loathe her—
Or not at least beyond abhorring silence.
(Hands MORO the packet)

YOLANDA

Amaury!

AMAURY

No word more—now or ever!
(To MORO)
On with it! Wait no longer for the leaven
Of their adulteries to sicken them.

MORO

(unwillingly, taking their hands)
The Church, and the powers of this Island,
Invest me here to make you man and wife.

Be joined, you who have strayed away and sinned,
In soul, peace, and penitence forever.

(He signs the Cross)

(A silence, as for a moment all stand dazed. Then weeping is heard within, growing louder. It is ALESSA, who appears distracted on the balcony)

YOLANDA

(with dread and foreboding)

Alessa—?

ALESSA

Oh, my lady! . . . Oh, come quickly!

You have not wed him?

YOLANDA

Come where? What has happened?

ALESSA

She's dead! . . . Lady Berengere! . . . Oh come!

YOLANDA

No, no! . . . No! . . . It cannot be—it cannot!

(Wrung with anguish)

It must not be—now! Go and tell her

That I have . . . Go and wake her and tell her—

(Stumbling blindly, she goes herself, by the balcony. Doubt, fear, and awe seize upon all)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE: The Chapel of the Castle—or Chapel of the Magdalen—a few hours later. It is of stone, high-arched and gloomily adorned with Byzantine mosaics of gaunt saints on backgrounds of gold. The altar is at the rear and above it are large windows through which pours the moonlight. In front of it, on either side, rise two pillars supporting the roof, and on one of them, half way up, stands a stone image of the Magdalen. Forward are two other pillars whose bases form seats. The left wall has a door set suitably and hung with heavy curtains. In the rear are smaller doors leading to a sacristy, etc. The altar lamp and a few tapers burn.

ALESSA enters, as if just come from a sight that has awed her. She seeks to shake it off, then calls uncertainly:

ALESSA

Good Father! Father Moro! . . . He is not here.

(Staring, as at a remembrance)

The dead are strange! I did not know their power.

It is as if her spirit, still imprisoned,

Hovered beneath the pallor of her face

And strove to speak. . . . Good Father!

MORO

(appearing rear)

What would you have?

ALESSA

The acolytes summoned from Famagouste

To aid the burial rites for her have come.

They wait without.

MORO

Send two hither at once.

(Looking closely at her)

But stay. This passes silence. There must be

Some question. Do you understand this wedding?

The evil that has fallen upon this house?

ALESSA

I may not speak.

MORO

And wherefore—if you know?

ALESSA

(recitingly)

When God alone can act, speech is in vain.

MORO

Lady Yolanda's words! scarcely a shade

Of difference! Amid the sin and grief

That sorely blight these hours she but answers

"Heaven alone must clear away the evil,

And in its fitting season will. I cannot."
 Yet but a little since, I am told,
 She darkly bade the Paphian be gone
 From here—and without her.

ALESSA

(confessingly)

It is so.

MORO

Does she not, then, see that Amaury
 Is desperate for truth?

ALESSA

. . . The Acolytes

Are waiting, Father.

MORO

Go. But if this hour

Brings forth what you shall rue—

ALESSA

Not upon me

Should blame for these destinies be laid!

MORO

(as she goes, quickly)

In blindness still! Not a gleam to guide me.
 For Vittia Pisani, who alone
 Has shared or seemed to share this mystery
 Also repels my importunities.
 Oh Berengere Lusignan! . . . But my part
 Is only shriving prayer and preparation.

(Two acolytes enter, sleek, sanctimonious. He addresses one, turning
 back from the altar)

Come here. You are Serlio of the Ascension.
 This other I do not know.

THE SECOND

(ducking)

Milarion, Father,

From Santa Maria by the Templar's well,
 Which God looks on with plenal gratitude.

For though we are poor, and meek unworthy servants,
 We've given willingly our widow's mite;
 And now we—

MORO

You are summoned to this place
 For ministrations other than the tongue's.
 Prepare that altar—masses for the dead.

HILARION

Man is as grass that withers!

MORO

Kindle all

Its tapers. The departed shall be borne
 Hither for holy care and sacred rest.
 Do so, and when you have finished
 Look to that image of the Magdalen;
 Once it has fallen.

SERLIO

Domine, dirige!

We will do all, Father, instantly.

(They set to work forthwith—as MORO goes)

HILARION

(lighting a taper)

We'll have good wine for this!

SERLIO

Yi-il the Chian!

None's like the Chian! And tomorrow, meat!
 Last week old Ugo died and we had pheasant.

HILARION

When we are priests we'll give no comforting
 To wife or maid until we've sipped!

SERLIO

(tapping a chalice)

And supped!

Though 'tis a Friday and the Pope be dead!

(Tilting the cup, he smacks his lips and laughs. Both then tackle
 the job and deftly finish it)

HILARION

(viewing the result)

There, it is done! Now for the Magdalen.

(Mounts the base of the pillar)

Olympio, the cock who fetched us, said

It fell first on the very day—

SERLIO

Tchuck! tchuck!

Better no breath about that lord of Paphos,

Or any here. For till the dead are three

Days gone, you know—

HILARION

Hist! . . . the woman again!

(Feigning)

The blessed dead! in Purgatory may

They briefly bide!

SERLIO

Then dwell in Paradise

In peace, beside the Mother of God for ever!

ALESSA

(who has entered)

What is it you are whining—as if this

Were an All Hallow's Eve—and you, confessors?

HILARION

I lay that it is wise never to foul

The dead, even in thinking;

For they may hear us, none can say; and once

My mother saw a dead man who had gone

Unshriven start up white and cry aloud

When he was cursed.

SERLIO

O Lord!

ALESSA

(more perturbedly) Such things may be,

Or may not, however we deny them.

And now it is even said, too, that Venus,

The Anadyomene, who once ruled this island,
Has come again. . . . But you have finished? Soon
They bring her body here.

HILARION

This is all.

(Shifts the image and descends)

It will not totter again.

ALESSA

Would that it might

Of its own will upon—(breaking off) But you
are waited,

There in the corridor. The chant begins.

(Then brooding as they go)

I fear worse is to happen! . . . The Paphian

Is desperately mute. Lady Yolanda

As desperately stricken. Lord Amaury

Is stark and Lord Renier strangely still.

(She goes and draws back the curtains; the chant swells louder.

Then the cortege enters solemnly, to its place: MORO, the ACOLY-
TES, BERENGERE—borne on a litter; AMAURY, RENIER,
VITTIA, HASSAN, the WOMEN—and last YOLANDA. The
litter, with AMAURY by it, halts. The chanting ceases)

MORO

(as AMAURY kneels)

No moan or any toil of grief be here

Where we have brought her for sainted appeal,

But in this holy place, until the tomb,

Let her find rest.

AMAURY

Set down the bier.

MORO

Lone rest—

Then bliss afar for ever.

AMAURY

(rising)

Be it so.

But unto any, mother, who have brought you

Low to this couch, no ease should come again,

Nor peace to any who have put your life out;
 But dread and bitter horror—that have seemed
 To shrivel you with peacelessness and pain!
 And tears, appeaseless tears—
 Salt tears that rust the fountain of the heart!
 (He turns away half sobbing. A pause)

MORO

My son, relentless words.

AMAURY

(turning back)

To the relentless!

MORO

God hear you not.

AMAURY

Then He is not my God!

MORO

Enough, enough. (To the throng) Go now, and for her soul
 Freight, all of you, this tide of night with prayers.

AMAURY

Let only those who prized her, no others,
 Bend a kind knee in shriving supplication.
 For though naught's in the world prayer may not move,
 Only the lips that loved and honored her
 Should lift, for her any sin, beseeching!
 (Toward YOLANDA)

They, and no other!

YOLANDA

... Then, hear mine, mother!

AMAURY

That name again—from you?

YOLANDA

(at the bier) While I have breath!
 And though I am held purgeless of that sin

YOLANDA

(pointing)

Look on her face and see.

AMAURY

(at the bier)

Upon her face—

Where not oblivion, the void of death,
Has hid away, or can, the agony
Of her last terror, but it trembles still.

(Turning away)

I tell you, no. Grief was enough, but now
Through it has risen mystery that chokes
As a miasma from Iscariot's tomb.
And till this pall of doubt is torn away
No earth shall fall and quicken with her dust—
But I will search her face—till it reveals.

CAMARIN

He raves.

AMAURY

Iscariot, yes!

YOLANDA

(between them)

I pray you, peace!

AMAURY

That you may palter?

YOLANDA

That she may not grieve.

(Turning to the bier)

For if her soul is near it now is wrung
With rancor! . . . Near? . . . Ah! would that it were,
To hear me and impart
Its dim unhappiness and helpless want.
For, mother, were you now about us, vain,
Invisible, and without any voice
To tell us of you—were you, and could hear
Through the cold silence that envelops you
So humanly, and seeming but a veil,
Then would you hear me say— (Starting back)
Oh God!

AMAURY

. . . Yolanda!

RENIER

(hoarsely)

What is it now, girl?

YOLANDA

Did you not see?

(Her eyes fixed on Berengere)

Mother . . . do you hear me? . . . Mother?

RENIER

Hear you?

YOLANDA

She breathes!

VITTIA

No, but you—!

YOLANDA

Mother! . . . Her breast moves!

(Amid consternation)

Stand back from her!

AMAURY

. . . Oh! . . .

YOLANDA

And now, her eyes—

They open, see!

RENIER

. . . Soul of God!

YOLANDA

And too,

Her lips are striving to speak, faint, so faintly.

Can you not hear?

BERENGERE

. . . Renier . . . Amaury . . .

Where am I? . . .

AMAURY

Mother!

BERENGERE

I must speak. Hear me . . .

(Half raising herself)

Oh hear! . . .

RENIER

We do. Speak . . .

BERENGERE

Christ save me . . . Christ!

Yolanda's innocent, and I . . . 'twas I!

(Sinks back)

AMAURY

(bewilderedly)

What is it that she says?

BERENGERE

. . . Camarin, we . . .

(She shudders and dies, amid low-uttered awe. RENIER, bending over her, suddenly straightens—then with suppressed rage draws his sword. CAMARIN too draws, for the game is up. They face desperately)

AMAURY

(as RENIER attacks)

This is a darkness which—

YOLANDA

(with dread)

Amaury, in!

Compel Lord Renier back at once—oh quick!

He cannot live now against the fury

Of Camarin—desperate for his life!

Do not delay or question! Strike! Strike!

(As AMAURY rushes in)

Mother of God, and holy Magdalen

In Heaven, now defend him . . . if in Heaven

There's any love!

VITTIA

(fiercely) Beat him off, Camarin!
 Avenge Berengere's death! In that only
 Lies safety for us!

YOLANDA

And it comes too late!
 (With joy as CAMARIN staggers)
 He's down! He is wounded!

CAMARIN

(dropping his sword) . . . Berengere!
 (Groaning he sinks backward toward the pillar supporting the
 Magdalen. As he strikes it, the image totters, crashing down on him)
 (cry of awe goes up. HASSAN comes forward)

HASSAN

(kneeling to learn)
 He's dead!

ALESSA

(low) The Magdalen!

HASSAN

. . . No breath's in him.
 (Rises and crosses himself)

RENIER

(taking command, amid a choking silence)
 Bear him without then, ever, from this place,
 That henceforth shall know no holy rite,
 And from our gates, I care not to what tomb.
 (To AMAURY who stares dazedly)
 Then you shall hear, my son, this mystery
 That measures like a madness to your sight.
 (To those who lift the body)
 Bear it without. The guilt of it stifles me.
 (To VITTIA)

And you, follow! For I still have powers
 That I may use. (To YOLANDA) You, girl, may stay.

(All but AMAURY and YOLANDA follow the body, which is
 borne out. To AMAURY, RENIER continues:)

Now you shall hear—with helpless grief and shame,
 But with exalted pride and happy tears;
 Then come obliteration! (To YOLANDA) Now, girl, speak:
 Tell all; for nobility had never
 A braver or better title to the truth.

(He kisses her hand and goes, leaving her stunned)

AMAURY

(at first unable to speak)

This reverence from him? this praise to you,
 As to an angel?

YOLANDA

Amaury . . . oh!

AMAURY

What is it?

What does it all mean? or what does the world
 Suddenly mean again, after so long?

YOLANDA

(humbly grateful)

To save her who is dead from death and shame
 I took her place within Camarin's arms.

AMAURY

You? . . . in his arms? . . . You did this for her?
 Endured disgrace and shame—and dishonor?
 Driven by us, pitilessly did it?
 Though pure as Paradise of any sin?

YOLANDA

For you I did, Amaury! . . . yet for her—
 Who sleeps forgiven there, while her spirit
 Has winged, free of guilt, to that Throne
 Whose haven heals all shame!
 For her I did—but oh for you, my own,
 Whose least word is infinite with Spring,
 Whose smile is light, filling the air with dawn,
 Whose touch wafture of immortality
 Over my weariness, and whose eyes, now,

Seem as the first beam that God uplifted
Over the uncreated.

In the far singing mother-dawn of the world.

(As he clasps her ecstatically)

Come with me then, but tearless, to her side.

(They go to the bier and stand as in a dream. Then after a while
she whispers reverently)

While there is sin to sway the world and sink it,

Pity should be as strong as love or death.

(Wrapped in reverent joy, they kneel in the moonlight)

THE END

THE MYSTIC

There is a quest that calls me,
In nights when I am lone,
The need to ride where the ways divide
The Known from the Unknown.
I mount what thought is near me
And soon I reach the place,
The tenuous rim where the Seen grows dim
And the Sightless hides its face.

*I have ridden the wind,
I have ridden the sea,
I have ridden the moon and stars.
I have set my feet in the stirrup seat
Of a comet coursing Mars.
And everywhere
Through the earth and air
My thought speeds, lightning-shod,
It comes to a place where checking pace
It cries, 'Beyond lies God!'*

It calls me out of the darkness,
It calls me out of sleep,

'Ride! ride! for you must, to the end of Dust!'
It bids—and on I sweep
To the wide outposts of Being,
Where there is Gulf alone—
And through a Vast that was never passed
I listen for Life's tone.

*I have ridden the wind,
I have ridden the night,
I have ridden the ghosts that flee
From the vaults of death like a chilling breath
Over eternity.
And everywhere
Is the world laid bare—
Ether and star and clod—
Until I wind to its brink and find
But the cry, 'Beyond lies God!'*

It calls me and ever calls me!
And vainly I reply,
'Fools only ride where the ways divide
What Is from the Whence and Why!'
I am lifted into the saddle
Of thoughts too strong to tame,
And down the deeps and over the steeps
I find . . . ever the Same.

*I have ridden the wind,
I have ridden the stars,
I have ridden the force that flies
With far intent through the firmament
And each to each allies.
And everywhere
That a thought may dare
To gallop, mine has trod—
Only to stand at last on the strand
Where just beyond lies God.*

THE WIFE OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

The wife of Judas Iscariot
Went out into the night,
She thought she heard a voice crying:
Was it to left or right?

She went forth to the Joppa Gate,
Three crosses hung on high.
The one was a thief's, the other a thief's,
The third she went not nigh.

For still she heard the voice crying:
Was it to right or left?
Or was it but a wind of fear
That blew her on bereft?

She went down from the Joppa Gate
Into the black ravine.
She climbed up by the rocky path
To where a tree was seen.

And 'What, sooth, do I follow here?
Is it my own mad mind?
Judas! Judas Iscariot!'
She called upon the wind.

'Judas! Judas Iscariot!'
She crept beneath the tree.
What thing was it that swung there,
Hung so dolorously?

'Judas! Judas Iscariot!'
She touched it with her hand.
The leaves shivered above her head,
To make her understand.

'Judas! Judas! my love! my lord!'
Her hands went o'er it fast,
From foot to thigh, from thigh to throat,
And stopped—there—at last.

'Judas! Judas! what has He done,
The Christ you followed so!'
More than the silver left on him
Made answer to her woe.

'Judas! Judas! what has He done!
O has it come to this!
The Kingdom promised has but proved
For you a soul-abyss!

'Was He the Christ and let it be?' . . .
She cut him from the limb,
And held him in her arms there
And wept, over him.

'None in the world shall ever know
Your doubts of Him but I!
"Traitor! traitor! and only traitor!"
Will ever be their cry!

'None in the world shall ever know—
But I who am your wife!'
She flung the silver from his purse:
It made a bitter strife.

It rattled on the ringing rocks
And fell to the ravine.
'Was He the Christ and let it be?'
She moaned, still, between.

She held him in her arms there,
And kissed his lips aright,
The lips of Judas Iscariot,
Who hanged himself that night.

BROTHER GIAN

(Of the Benedictines at Monte Cassino, circa 1080)

Dear Jesus Christ, I'm Brother Gian.
Within my cell I sit and scratch
From pagan parchments words writ on

Such vellum as not kings can match:
Words, Greek and Latin—all profane.
Three Homers I have quite erased,
And look to see their lines replaced
By lives of Saints without a stain.

This Virgil now: I'll do it next.
Last night it tempted me to peep
A moment at its wicked text,
Telling of nymphs . . . I could not sleep
Dear Jesus Christ, I dreamt I was
A faun within a Bacchic rout,
And one white creature chose me out:
I broke with kisses all Thy laws.

Here is the place . . . I danced as wild
As any bacchant of them all,
With ivy-woven tresses whiled
Mad hours that maddened at her call.
She led me far into the wood
Where not a Pan or Satyr leapt.
Dear Jesus Christ, 'twas Satan swept
Me on—I scarcely understood.

Here is the place. . . . For in my dream
Each letter trembled and became
A nymph: the parchment was a stream
Of shapes that glimmered without shame.
I danced and followed where she fled
With lips wine-glad bent back to shout.
Dear Jesus Christ, beyond a doubt
She rose where 'Venus' here I read.

So first of all I raze its shame!
And pray that in its place may stand
Some letter of the Virgin's name
Writ by a pure and holy hand,
And set about with red and gold
And lilies—where my eyes still see

But glimmering limbs that tempt and flee,
But shimmering arms that would enfold.

Dead Jesus Christ, this I confess,
And fasting will I toil until
The vellum, white as holiness,
Shall be fit for an angel's quill!
An angel like the nymph with eyes
And body that . . . Dear Jesus Christ,
To woman was man sacrificed!
From Eve his sins forever rise!

CHANSON OF THE BELLS OF OSENEY

(13th Century)

The bells of Osenéy
(Hautclere, Doucement, Austyn)
Chant sweetly every day,
And sadly, for our sin.
The bells of Osenéy
(John, Gabriel, Marie)
Chant Lowly,
Chant slowly,
Chant wistfully and holy
Of Christ, our Paladin.

Hautclere chants to the East
(His tongue is silvery high),
And Austyn like a priest
Sends west a weighty cry.
But Doucement set between
(Like an appeasive nun)
Chants cheerily,
Chants clearly,
As if Christ heard her nearly,
A plea to every sky.

A plea that John takes up
(He is the Evangelist)

Till Gabriel's angel cup
 Pours sound to sun or mist.
 And last of all Marie
 (The Virgin-voice of God)
 Peals purely,
 Demurely,
 And with a tone so surely
 Divine, that all must hear.

The bells of Osenéy
 (Doucement, Austyn, Hautclere)
 Pour ever day by day
 Their peals on the rapt air;
 And with their mellow mates
 (John, Gabriel, Marie)
 Tell slowly,
 Tell lowly,
 Of Christ the High and Holy,
 Who makes the whole world fair.

OFF THE IRISH COAST

Gulls on the wind!
 Crying! Crying!
 Are you the ghosts
 Of Erin's dead?
 Of the forlorn
 Whose days went sighing
 Ever for Beauty
 That ever fled?

Ever for Light
 That never kindled?
 Ever for Song
 No lips have sung?
 Ever for Joy
 That ever dwindled?
 Ever for Love that stung?

THE GREAT SEDUCER

Who looks too long from his window
At the grey, wide, cold sea,
Where breakers scour the beaches
With fingers of sharp foam;
Who looks too long through the grey pane
At the mad, wild, bold sea,
Shall sell his hearth to a stranger
And turn his back on home.

Who looks too long from his window—
Though his wife waits by the fireside—
At a ship's wings in the offing,
At a gull's wings on air,
Shall latch his gate behind him,
Though his cattle call from the byre-side,
And kiss his wife—and leave her—
And wander everywhere.

Who looks too long in the twilight,
Or the dawn-light, or the noon-light,
Who sees an anchor lifted
And hunger past content,
Shall pack his chest for the world's end,
For alien sun—or moonlight,
And follow the wind, sateless,
To Disillusionment!

THE PROFLIGATE

Peace! I must go,
Though you are all to me,
Comrade and friend,
Mistress and wife.
Ask me not why—
It is life's call to me:
Staying I die.

Faithless I am:
Faithful could never be.
Mating with you
Should have brought rest.
So I believed:
But—as 'twill ever be—
I was deceived.

Lure of the blood,
Whim of perversity,
Harries me on—
Want of the new;
Craving to clasp
Though through adversity
Some one not you.

Craving for sin,
Craving for punishment—
Even for pain,
Stinging and wild.
Craving to be,
Spite of admonishment,
Madly defiled.

Yet ever free—
Though you are beautiful!
None to compare
With you I'll find!—
Free to rove on,
Base and undutiful,
Cruel, unkind.

For I am thus.
Nothing for long to me
Ever can seem
Clear of distaste.
Fairest of lips,
If they belong to me,
Soon become waste.

Too many wants
God has put into me,
Noble and vile,
Human, divine.
So till life ends
It shall bring sin to me—
And husks for swine.

THE SOUND OF RAIN

Older than anything else in the world
Is the sound of rain.
Earth's without form again, and void,
And the waters cover it.
Land has not risen above its tidal plain,
And grey is the gloom of all, in and around and above it.

Life is an unborn brooding still
On the face of the earth,
And God has not found a way, yet,
To dwell in the waters.
And the sound of rain is a sound that is never still,
And men have not come yet, nor the sons of men nor the daughters.

No green thing is about; and no bird's wing
Alights in branches.
Time and space are steeped in a sound
That is steeped in sorrow.
Winds are unknown; there is only room for the sigh
That besogs the day and the night, and the end of night, and the
morrow.

SPRING FEVER

A soft wind
Blows from the evening star,
Blows through budding maples up to my window.
It brings upon its breast, from the April streets,
Voices of children
And of lovers leaning tenderly under new leaves.

A dog bays . . . plaintive, distant, insistent.
Some fibre of him remembers,
As the scented moon floats,
Primitive trails and mating calls
Before he followed man. . . .
He bays again and I tremble a little
With wildness, loneliness, longing.

There is music somewhere . . .
Mellowness . . . mute . . . everywhere,
Febrile passion pervading the night
Like a tincture, ancient, ineffable . . .
A tincture eternally restive.

Antony! it was this that drove you
To Egypt and Cleopatra.
Abelard, your God was too weak for it!

OLD AGE

I have heard the wild geese,
I have seen the leaves fall,
There was frost last night
On the garden wall.
It is gone today
And I hear the wind call;
The wind? . . . that is all.

If the swallow will light
When evening is near;
If the crane will not scream
Like a soul in fear;
I will think no more
Of the dying year,
And the wind, its seer.

NEW DREAMS FOR OLD

Is there no voice in the world to come crying,
 'New dreams for old;
 New for old!?'
Many have long in my heart been lying,
 Faded, weary, and cold.
All of them, all, would I give for a new one.
 (Is there no seeker
 Of dreams that were?)
Nor would I ask if the new were a true one:
 Only for new dreams!
 New for old!

For I am here, half way of my journey,
 Here with the old!
 All so old!
And the best heart with death is at tourney,
 If naught new it is told.
Will there no voice, then, come—or a vision—
 Come with the beauty
 That ever blows
Out of the lands that are called Elysian?
 I must have new dreams!
 New for old!

DANIEL BOONE'S LAST LOOK WESTWARD

I'm only four-score years, my sons, and a few
To fill the measure up. And so I shouldn't
Be shut here like an old hound by the fire
To dream of deeds I still have wind to do.
Maybe I have performed enough for one man;
For there's Kentucky cut from the wilderness
And sewed fast to the States by law and order—
Which I'm not saying isn't good for them
Who like pullin' in harness with their neighbors.
But I keep seein' trails—runnin' to westward

And northwest—Indian-footed trails
That no white man has ever pierced an eye through;
And beyond them are prairie lands and forests
Which settlers comin' after me could scalp
And sell, if silver is the game they're seekin';
And the Almighty means my eyes to see them,
Else He'd have made my sight dim and rheumy
By now—and where's the deer or bear that gambols
Before my gun and goes away to say so?

It's kind of shiftless maybe, I'll allow,
To want to keep always *beyond* the settlements
Not *in* them; ten near families is too many.
But the Lord never meant the plough to be
My instrument: I get to the end of a furrow
And there's the wilderness waitin', all creation,
And I just have to find a path across it—
As your ma, there, knows; though I never could tell her
The reason, till they took Kentucky in.
And then I saw that the cunnin' to be wise
With animals and savages was more
Than love of powder and shot; and that God used
My axe to hew a realm out. And there's more realms
Yet to be hewed—and God's grindin' the axes,
I'll tell you that. For, young Lewis and Clark,
Sons of my two old friends, are comin' tomorrow
With unblazed trails of the Northwest in their eyes;
And who knows but that land's as big as Kentucky
And Illinois too; and that they're comin'
For more than to look at an old hound by the fire?
There's one run in me yet; and if I died
Somewhere upon a far new trail with them,
There's coffin-board saved—and I'd sleep better . . .
Unless your ma, this time, wouldn't be willin'
To pack my kit and draw the latch of the door.

She won't eh? Then it's dodderin' here, I reckon,
And dreamin'. Put on a fresh log, and let be.

Young Lewis and Clark will need a-many like me,
 though,
Before they hew that Northwest into the world.

A ROAMER REVERTS

The same thatch and food
At dusk when work is over!
I want the evening star
To butter my bread with.
The golden evening star,
And the new moon's knife to spread it;
For the heart of me hungers
Toward what's beyond the far.

The old things are good things:
A roof, a fire, and a wife
To sit by me and spin
While children throng her knee;
And talk of what has been:
Dear God, women are well so:
But a man wants the world's end
To lose his soul in.

He wants to go—and forget;
And remember—and repent;
And forget again—and follow
The trail of the Not-To-Be.
To climb, fight and wallow;
Even stake claims in Hell,
If he may only mine there
Metals of liberty.

He wants ever to go,
Even though he has learnt,
As I, that only the feet
That fare to a hearth fare far.
So husks however unmeet
On a highway he'll choose,
Rather than any bread spread
With what's at home to eat.

DUSK FROM A TRAIN WINDOW

There is a moment between day and night
When magic lives in light,
When snow upon the fields lies like blue sleep,
And the purple intricate trees
Stand out enchanted in the cold silences
Like branching mysteries;
A moment when one farm-lamp's window glow
Seems as I pass upon a speeding train
To make all human loss a sudden gain,
Because the ancient sacraments of home,
The humble sacraments of food and rest,
Are taken there in the untroubled gloam
By hearts that love, the ministrant, has blest.
There is a moment between day and night
When magic lives in light.

IN THE DEEP MIDNIGHT

I

Clanging, ever clanging!
Clanging in the deep midnight, train-bells clanging!
Over the city sleeping,
Over the silent huddle of roofs and shadows,
Over the hearts of thousands, lying enchambered, breathing
evenly,
Or breathing and tossing, to and fro, on torn seas of insomnia;
Clanging over the streets, restless clanging—
Over hushed streets, with blue electric lights lonesomely burn-
ing;
Over the steepled churches—
The shrines dark and empty save for the voiceless souls of
Bibles;
Over the wan Hospital, the wards where the sick lie waking a
little,
And where they moan a little, not knowing why;
Over the Jail, where the guilty, too, wake and stir in their ward,

And where they start, with waging blood, and moan and beat
at their bars,
Because for them there is neither home nor highway;
Over that other prison, where the dead lie,
But wake not at all, nor struggle, nor beat at their bars!
Ever, ever clanging!

II

O voiceful restlessness!
Vibrant soul of the world's coming and going,
Resonant want of it, restive vent of it, and of desire, desire—
Desire to wander back to the peace of the known,
Or out and away to the anywhere of deliverance—
How many, a-dream, are caught in the net of your ringing!
How many turn in their sleep and are caught away to the sea's
roaring,
Are caught away . . . over corn tossing, and woods waving, and
rivers,
Past the red-lit or the green-lit stations, clanging,
Away to the dark of the East or the dark of the West!
How many remember, far from mother or wife,
And wander if there is waking, if there is waiting,
If there are tears falling for them in the darkness!
How many, under your quaver, under your clamour and
evocation,
See sudden again the far-aways of childhood,
Brought forth from the shadowy bournes of years and grief and
blind forgetting,
To merge again in the mists of sleep's immunizing!
How many, under your riot, under your plangence, under your
passion,
Ride again over cattle-wilds, again over buttes and mesas,
Unlassoed still by Life, lords of its spaces, of its pastures!
How many, mated with sin, disease, and stagnance,
In dens, moonless and loveless, where the free sweet winds would
sicken,
Feel, as they hear, the nails of their souls' coffin,
Driven, driven, driven, driven in!

III

It passes, as all passes; there is silence.
 The huddled roofs dream again in the shadows,
 With the blue electric lights lonesomely burning, the streets
 unbroken;
 Night's immemorial opiate rules all.
 And the stars come closer, beaten off no more by the sound's
 urgence,
 Intimate now, and ready with revelations, with reachings;
 For the sky has become the confessional of God,
 And, Priest of the Universe, He hears its need—and shrives it—
 Till all the crying that was, now is comfort,
 All want that was is peace . . . all clanging rest!

From LURID LIVES

I

RASPUTIN

(To his band of court ladies and other satellites)

Build an altar in my chamber,
 Spread linen upon the floor,
 Let two candles burn.
 I am Russian, I am God,
 I am God's czar on earth:
 You shall be as I!

Build an altar! Bring food,
 Bring foam of red champagne.
 We shall feast, in a ring,
 Chanting hymns around!
 Then communing, cup to cup,
 We shall rise like bubbles up,
 Rise and float on air!
 For by love's might, divine,
 You'll be His, being mine,
 You'll be His. Haste, then,
 Let our joys twine!

For, remember this,
You, high and haughty,
I was a muzhik in the wilds,
I was a pilgrim on the roads,
I have sinned, wholly.
And to sinners alone come,
When they pray, spent and dumb,
Blissfullest salvation.
So to you, as to me,
There shall come the ecstasy
God bids me give you.
Body and soul I will fuse
In you. Then, when I choose,
I will kiss and save you!

Yes! I, a muzhik lowly,
I can do this thing.
Jesus Christ knew a manger.
I to filth am no stranger,
Long I fed as swine:
Till a day when men beheld
Might in me, and women enspelled
Led me to the throne—
Where the Czarina sat, palely,
Waiting for an heir.
And to her they cried
'A saint, of the Crucified,
Who transcends sin!
Bid the Czar hear him,
Though it be chagrin.
Bid the Czar hear him!' . . .
An heir entered in!

Haste, then! in Christ's name!
I am Russia's holy flame,
I, the sin-transcender!
Ministers of state, or war,
Seek me out, near and far,
Kiss my hands, fawning.

For they know none may dare
Rise against my power.
Over the steppes, in their folly,
They should go, melancholy,
Eating wind and rain!
Over the snow they should go—
To Siberia's pain!
But to all who gather
In my holy band
There shall come bliss.
They shall dance up to God,
Glide to salvation.
They shall feel the thirst of sin,
Given first to Adam.
They shall eat the apple of Eve,
Then, when they win reprieve,
Joy, past all measure,
They shall know why I teach
Sinners alone to Heaven reach;
Yes, and why fools, who cry
I shall fail and fall, lie!
Haste, then; build our shrine,
With a holy pleasure.

II

A CHICAGO RED

(In a Grain Elevator)

I've got the sack, have I, and I can go?
I needn't mouth, toothless, about it either?
My fangs are out, you're guessing, from now on?
By God, and if they are, isn't there reason?
Haven't I bitten enough at hands like yours,
You 'wheat king of the prairies,' to be toothless?
Haven't I gnawed at cunning lies that strangle
A poor man's guts and tell him slenderness
Of belly's good—better than rich men's fat?
Haven't I, day and night, never weary,

Sunk my teeth in the gilded rotten heels
Of your curst labour-grinding money-gods? . . .
And do you sit there swiveling in comfort,
With twenty million dollars in your pockets
And twenty million thefts upon your soul,
And smile,
And think: 'The old goat's Heaven is Bolshevism,
Damn pity he can't go and chew his cud there?'

You do, smug and contemptuous; and you sneer, too,
That now I'm off I'll talk myself cross-eyed!
A lie! It's looking upon the looting likes
Of such as you, who're crooked as hell-claws,
Who only know one straight line in the world—
To the nearest pile of pelf—that twists my eyes!
It's knowing how you slip the price of bread up,
You and your kind, a thieving cent or two,
And then how, with the profit pouched, you see
Upon each coin only, 'In God We Trust,'
Not starving faces staring at your greed—
Women's faces, little wizened children's,
In Europe there, or every-hungry Asia!
It's knowing how the jazz of gold deafs you
To the rattle of bones, that are so fleshless worms
Couldn't live on them, into unnumbered graves!
By the blood of Truth it is! And what's your
answer?

'This is a free country. Take away
The right of a man to make all that he can,
Or confiscate his money when he's made it,
And the spine of civilization breaks in two.
While as for Europe, let her work and pay,
Not war; let spawning China cease to breed
Superfluous hordes if she dislikes famine . . .
I had no children till I made a fortune. . . .'

You pea's-cod of importance, with your 'I',
That's but a flimsy futile ark of self
Upon the Flood now beginning to rise!

When will you learn the only safety for it—
 And for humanity—is to invite
All into it, and then rename it 'We'?
 When will you learn God gives the soil grain,
 Not for your greed, not to be garnered up
 In wormy elevators and gambled with,
 But to feed hungry lips?
 When will you grasp the *new* gospel of Christ,
 That workers only shall inherit the earth,
 And that rewarded work alone is Heaven?
 Never, you think, never, while such flaunters
 Of red rags as I, with bile for blood
 And dynamite for brains, keep raving it?
 Then you will, so help me, when you see
 How Revolution that is surging up
 Already at the sluice-gates of the world
 Shall . . .'

God! It's all useless; for no tide
 Of rage can ever overwhelm a land
 So bloated with the fat of food and fortune!

From SONGS TO A. H. R.

I

FREE

O were your heart not wide, dear,
 And were your soul not high,
 And were not both so deep, too,
 Deep as the April sky,
 I should not find love freedom,
 But know a need to range
 All heaven and hell—a prisoner
 Pining for space and change.

But since there's depth within you
 To hang my moon and stars,
 Since I have not to beat vain wings
 Against offending bars,

I find all other spaces
That lie *beyond* our love
Are prisons—all alluring worlds
Below me or above.

II

THE HEART'S QUESTION

Is it such a little thing
To find a wind-flower
Twinkling in the wild-wood
Hour after hour,
Dancing to the wind's pipe
With a happy nod?
Is it such a little thing?
I think it is God.

Is it such a little thing
To find the young moon
Flitting through the tree boughs
In her silver shoon,
Seeking for the wind-flower
There along the sod?
Is it such a little thing?
I think it is God.

Is it such a little thing
To find in your face
Something of the wind-flower
And young moon's grace?
Something of the wild-wood,
Ever faery-trod?
Is it such a little thing?
I think it is God.

III

WHEN THE WIND IS LOW

When the wind is low, and the sea is soft,
And the far heat-lightning plays

On the rim of the West where dark clouds nest
On a darker bank of haze;
When I lean at the rail with you that I love
And gaze to my heart's content;
I know that the heavens are there above—
But you are my firmament.

When the phosphor-stars are thrown from the bow
And the watch climbs up the shroud;
When the dim mast dips as the vessel slips
Through the foam that seethes aloud;
I know that the years of our life are few,
And fain as a bird to flee,
That time is as brief as a drop of dew—
But you are eternity.

IV

HOW MANY WAYS

How many ways the Infinite has
Tonight, in earth and sky:
A falling star, a rustling leaf,
The night-wind ebbing by.
How many ways the Infinite has:
A firefly over the lea,
A whippoorwill in the wooded hill,
And your dear love to me.

How many ways the Infinite has:
The moon out of the East;
A cloud that waits her shepherding,
To wander silver-fleeced.
How many ways the Infinite has:
A home-light in the West,
And joy deep-glowing in your eyes,
Wherein is all my rest.

V

IN A DARK HOUR

You are not with me—only the moon,
The sea and the gulls' cry, out of tune;
The myriad cry of the gulls still strewn
On the sands where the tide will enter soon.

You are not with me, only the breath
Of the wind—and then the wind's death;
A shrouding silence then that saith,
'Even as wind love vanisheth.'

You are not with me—only fear,
As old as earth's first frenzied bier,
That severed two whose hearts were near—
And left one with all life unclear.

VI

LOVE AND INFINITY

Across the kindling twilight moon
A late gull wings to rest.
The sea is murmuring underneath
Its vast eternal quest.
The coast-light flashes over the tide
A red and warning eye,
And oh, the world is very wide,
But you are nigh!

The stars come out from zone to zone,
The wind knows every one
And blows their message to my heart,
As it has ever done.
'They are all God's,' it tells me, 'all,
However huge or high.'
But ah, I could not trust its call—
Were you not by!

VII

SWALLOWS

In a room that we love,
Under a lamp,
Whose soft glow falls around,
We sit each night and you read to me,
Through the silence soul-profound.
And black on the yellow frieze of the walls
The swallows fly unchanging;
Round, round, yet never round,
Ranging,—yet never ranging.

We sit and you read, your face aglow,
While amid dreams that start
I watch the swallows
As each follows
The other, swift, apart.
Till oft it seems that your words are birds,
Flying into my heart,
And singing there, and bringing there
Love's more than artless art.

So never, in lands however far,
Or seas that wash them round,
Shall I see wings along the sky,
But instantly the sound
Of your voice shall come,
And the sky, changing,
Shall be the room we love,
With its lamp-glow—and time-flow—
And happy swallows ranging.

VIII

HOROLOGUE

I have a clock within me
(Call it a heart if you will)
That tells me the time of timeless things
Beyond any skill.

That tells me how you will lift your head,
Just as you turn a page,
And say to me, "I love you!"
Words that never age.
Or how you will rise rapturously
And do some tender thing
That makes love seem as wonderful
As a desert spring.
I have a clock whose beating
Rounds ever toward some chime
Of harmonies between us
That heal the hurts of time.

IX

SUFFICINGS

Day for the mind,
But night for the soul.
Sun for delight,
But moon to console.
Song for the glad,
But silence for rest.
God for the world—
But you for my breast!

X

ASSUAGEMENT

How close tonight the whippoorwill
Calls, as the stars come out;
And then how like a far echo—shrill
No more, but a dream-shout.
How softly there does the Infinite
Lift up the silver moon,
And then how silently He sets
Our care-sick hearts in tune.

How soothingly does the night-wind sigh,
And ease the earth to sleep.

How fugitive is the cricket's cry,
But, oh, with life how deep.
How vastly stretches the universe,
How lone and how aloof,
Until our hands touch—then it seems
But love's star-built roof.

XI

TRANSFUSION

A shoal-light flashes east,
And livid lightning west,
The silvery dark night-sea between,
On which we ride at rest,
And gaze far, far away
Into the fretless skies,
World-sadness in our thought—but ah,
Content within our eyes.

The ship's bell strikes—the sound
Floats shrouded to our ears,
Then suddenly, as at a touch,
The universe appears
A Presence Infinite
That penetrates our love
And makes us one with night and sea
And all the stars above.

XII

SHELTER

I have been out where the winds are,
And tossing tops of trees,
And clouds that sweep from rim to rim
Of blue infinities.
And all was a sound and sway there, a surging of unrest:
So now I am wanting silence, and the heart I love best.

Yes, and a quiet book, too,
Of pensive poetry,

In which to let the lines lapse
Away, unlessonedly.
For I shall gather, somehow, from the soft fire's glow,
And from the eyes I love best, all I need to know.

And hours shall slip to embers,
And on the hearth lie;
And every wind that blew me,
And every want, die.
Then I shall take the hand I love best, and turn to sleep;
And, if God wills, at dawn wake, again, to laugh or weep.

XIII

TRANSIENCY

Come, let us watch that rock down in the tide.
(So many things must go, so many things!)
Once we were young and the world was not so wide,
Or love had wings.

Once we could round the earth without a sail,
(The magic winds are gone, the magic foam!)
Where was the harbour that we did not hail,
That was not home?

Come, we will watch the moon with thoughts, not dreams.
(Whatever goes, love stays, love warm and wise!)
Winged is youth; and yet—our way *still* seems
Toward paradise!

XIV

LAST LINES

1

If I could only go back and find you there,
Not a dark empty house for sale to strangers;
If I could only go back, and at the stair
Call up and hear you answer and come down,

With love kindling your lips and eyes and hair
The years had silvered with a light as fair
As ever allured my heart to youthful dangers;

If I could only go back, across the Park,
And then a little way to the dear door
Which you will never open any more,
Go back and sit or read with you or talk,
Amid time-treasured books, of the least thing
Of all the thousands that were wont to stir
Our mated thoughts to take contented wing;

If I could only go back . . . But oh, I cannot;
Or if I do, only with Memory,
Which they who've known assure me is a friend,
But which I have found a foe without end
Stabbing me with her rapiers of grief
And desolation so relentlessly
That I can only stand stricken and cry,
"Let me forget forever, or let me die!"

2

I lie abed as on a cross,
Pierced by an appeaseless loss.
Stretched and silent, numb and stark,
I lie staring into the dark.

Somewhere overhead in the rain
The night mail is flying again,
Hurrying on till in the height
Hushed and far it leaves but night.

Seeking a faith to ease for me
The ache of the destiny
Death of you has brought I call
"Are you anywhere at all?"

But for answer only hear
 The unceasing grind of time's gear.
 No night mail will bring to me
 Word of you eternally.

3

Grass grows tall in the yard,
 And weeds have taken the grass,
 But why should that not be now
 That your feet will never pass
 Over either again
 To the flowers that wait your coming?
 Or why should not one butterfly only
 Flit where the bees are humming?

A sign *For Sale* stands white
 In the ivy by the door,
 Like the tomb you lie under
 In the place where the dead store
 Their memories forever
 Against the ravage of sorrow.
 Be happy, any who buy this house;
 Wait not till tomorrow!

For death has no calendar
 To tell the days or the years;
 There is neither light nor darkness
 In the earth's shrouded biers.
 Do not wait till tomorrow.
 Grass grows tall by the door—
 And I can only turn away moaning
 "Never, oh never more!"

DAVID

CHARACTERS

SAUL King of Israel
 JONATHAN Heir to the Throne
 ISHUI His Brother

SAMUEL	.....	The Prophet of Israel
ABNER	.....	Captain of the Host of Israel
DOEG	.....	An Edomite, Chief Servant of Saul and Suitor for Michal
ADRIEL	.....	A Lord of Meholah, Suitor for Merab
DAVID	.....	A Shepherd, secretly annointed King
ABISHAI	.....	A Follower of David
Abiathar	.....	A Priest and Follower of David
A PHILISTINE SPY		
AHINOAM	.....	The Queen
MERAB	.....	} Daughters of Saul and Ahinoam
MICHAL	.....	
MIRIAM	.....	A Blind Prophetess, later the 'Witch of Endor'
JUDITH	.....	} Timbrel Players of the King
LEAH	.....	
ZILLAH	.....	
ADAH	.....	Handmaiden to Merab
A Chorus of Women, a Band of Prophets, Followers of David, Soldiers of Saul, People of the Court, etc.		

DAVID

ACT I

SCENE: A Hall of Judgment in the palace of SAUL at Gibeah. The walls and pillars of cedar are richly carven—with serpents, pomegranates, and cherubim of gold. The floors are of bright marble; the throne is ivory hung with a lion's skin whose head is its foot-stool. On the right, by the throne, and on the left are doors to other portions of the palace: they are draped with woven curtains of purple and white. In the rear which is open and supported on pillars, a porch crosses the court. Through the porch, on the environing hills, glow the camp fires of the Philistines, the enemies of Israel. Lamps burn in the Hall and on the floor JUDITH, LEAH and ZILLAH are reclining restively.

JUDITH

(getting up impatiently)

O for a feast, pomegranate wine, and song!

ZILLAH

A feast indeed, with all the men in camp!
When was a laugh or any leaping here?

Never, and none to charm with timbreling!
 (She goes to the porch)

LEAH

(yawning)
 What shall we do?

JUDITH
 I'll dance!

ZILLA

Until you're dead!

JUDITH

Or till a youth weds Zilla for her beauty?
 I'll not soil mine with sullen fear all day
 Because these Philistines press round. As well
 We wenches gathering grapes or wool. Come, Leah!

LEAH

No, Judith. I'll put henna on my nails
 And mend my anklet.

ZILLA

(at the curtains) Oh! . . . oh, oh!

JUDITH

Now, sniffer

At curtains, what do you smell, nosing there,
 Dog, fox, or devil?

ZILLA

All of them!

JUDITH

(running to curtains) Zah, then!
 It is Prince Ishui! . . . and fury in him,
 A sallow, sour fury!
 Come, let us plague him till he spews at us.

ZILLA

Shall we, with David whom he hates?

JUDITH

Aie, David!

We'll put him in a very swinge of passion!

LEAH

Why does he hate David, Zilla?

JUDITH

Stupid!

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Because . . .

But hush, now! be meet and ready for him;

Look as for silly visions and for dreams!

(They pose. ISHUI enters. They sigh affectedly)

ISHUI

Now, timbrel-gauds, why do you gape here?

JUDITH

(starting)

Prince Ishui! It is Prince Ishui!

ZILLA

Then he will tell us what we die to know—

Of David! . . .

JUDITH

Saul's new singing harp-player!

Will he again come tonight, Prince Ishui?

And pluck us wild music from his strings,

Till we are wanton for a look from him,

And sigh, and laugh, and weep to the moon?

ISHUI

(with contempt)

Low thing!

Chaff of the king!

JUDITH

The king! I had not thought!

David a king! How beauteous would he be!

ISHUI

A—king?

JUDITH

Turban of sapphire! robe of gold!

ISHUI

Of Israel? This shepherd?

JUDITH

Who can tell?

Have you not heard how in the camp yesterday

Among war-old but fearful men he offered

To meet the great Philistine, Goliath,

Who towers over all men in Israel?

ISHUI

I've heard, scum, that you—

JUDITH

(derisively)

Hail to David!

To Saul's mighty harp-player, David!

(She laughs as ADRIEL enters; then the four go, dancing)

ADRIEL

(amused)

Ishui, in a rage?

ISHUI

Should I not be?

ADRIEL

Not you, nor any who would be himself.

ISHUI

Were I the god of Pharaoh and Egypt,

I should! For these timbrelers—

ADRIEL

What of them?

ISHUI

Their vile hints and taunts! their jibes and jestings!

Their . . . ! But, no matter, as you say, Adriel—

Though even for you, a guest here, their vapors

Held mockery!

ADRIEL

For me? How?

ISHUI

Who likes

Laughter against him?

ADRIEL

I was laughed at?

ISHUI

It is

This sheep-tending harp-player David,
Who casts a spell over the palace air,
Till he impassions to him all who breathe!

ADRIEL

That's but a mote. He's loveable and brave,
And music is a balm.

ISHUI

You too say so,

Fatuously as they?

ADRIEL

I do not see—

ISHUI

You shall, though twice blind. Are you not here
With gifts of gold and dream-bringing amethyst
To wed my sister Merab?

ADRIEL

It is so.

ISHUI

And you've the king's consent—but she denies?

ADRIEL

As every wind, you know it.

ISHUI

Still denies?

While you, lost in the maze of her, fare on
Blindly, and find no reason for it?

ADRIEL

But . . .

What reason can be? Women are not clear,
And least unto themselves.

ISHUI

Or to their *fools*?

Nay, bed your sword again in its scabbard.
It will not itch to make a ghost of me
When you have heard further. (Calling left) Adah!
(again) Adah!
(The curtains part. ADAH enters scowling)

ISHUI

Your mistress Merab, wench, whom does she love?
Unclench your hands.

ADAH

I hate her!

ISHUI

Answer, I say!

I am not milky Jonathan to suffer
Your hisses. Whom does she love?

ADAH

The shepherd, David!

ADRIEL

Merab does? . . .

ADAH

I do not care!

ADRIEL

Merab?

ADAH

She is unkind. I will not spy for her
On Michal, and I'll tell her secrets—all!
(Backing away)
And David does not love her—so she raves!
(Escapes)

ISHUI

Now do you see how "loveable" he is
 And trustable, Adriel of Meholah?
 I tell you that he stands athwart us all!
 Merab's heart is swung as a censer to him;
 My seat at table with the king—usurped;
 Doeg's harp silent, shunned and mildewed,
 Like any slave's! . . . the while all of us
 Are lepered with suspicion!

ADRIEL

(troubled)

By the king?

ISHUI

And Jonathan! and Michal! And whoever—
 (Breaks off, for MICHAL enters, leading MIRIAM)

ADRIEL

(as they pass)

Michal delay! Whom lead you?

MICHAL

Miriam,

A prophetess of Endor.

ISHUI

A witch and soothsayer
 Rather—one the king's own law forbids!

ADRIEL

How is the king tonight?

MICHAL

Not at rest.

He dreads Samuel's prophecy that soon
 The throne may pass from him, and darkens more
 Against this boundless Philistine Goliath
 Who dares at Israel daily upon the hills,
 As at mere starving dogs!

ADRIEL

Is David with him?

MICHAL

No, but soon to come, with his harp,
 And ease him—as so wondrously he can!
 With but a sunny waft of melody
 He lifts the hovering mad shadow from
 The king's brow—and lo, the Evil Spirit
 That troubles him is gone!

ISHUI

(waspathly) As you should be.
 Like any weeping wench to the women's quarters
 On bread and water, were I—!

MICHAL

What rage is *this*

ISHUI

Disdaining Doeg and his pleas to dust,
 His love, and the marriage needs of the kingdom,
 You are enamored of this David too?

MICHAL

(scornfully)
 I think my brother Ishui has a fever.
 (goes proudly with MIRIAM)

ISHUI

Again I ask if Adriel is kindled,
 Or must this shepherd put upon us more?

ADRIEL

But what dishonor's in him?

ISHUI

What is not?
 And what vile deception? . . . He meets Samuel,
 The prophet, in the secrecy of night
 And plots to steal the kingdom.

ADRIEL

With harp-playing
 And psalm saying, and talk of silly sheep?
 (SAUL'S voice is heard, rising within)

ISHUI

(pointing)

The proof of it is pouring into your ears.

ADRIEL

The king . . . ?

ISHUI

And Samuel at him, with some new
Dismay or refusal! . . . Stand and listen.

(SAUL, striding in with SAMUEL, mounts the throne)

SAUL

You threat and ever thunder threatening,
Pour seething prophecy into my veins
Till a simoon of madness in me moves!
Am I the king? the king, chosen and sealed?
And have I not ever been anathema
And bane to all the foes of Israel,
And strewed the earth with death of them?
Then do you now forbid that with gold
I bribe away this Philistine array
That fetters us with flame?

SAMUEL

(unshakably)

While there is awe

Of Heaven I do! . . . A champion must rise,
To level this Goliath down to death,
And loose a panic on them that will ruin.

SAUL

No champion will arise! . . . Forty days
Of seeking one are dead . . . I'll not wait
On miracles.

SAMUEL

Offer thy daughter then,
Michal, thy fairest—to whoever shall.

SAUL

My Michal, to whoever . . . ? I'll not do it.
My Michal, and against her will? . . . I'll not.

You ever drain me with demands for more,
Unceasingly.

SAMUEL

I tell you then, Saul,
Out of Jehovah and of time foreseen,
The hour is drawing nearer when the sceptre
Shall slip from your hands unto another.

SAUL

To—to another? . . . slip from me? . . . my sceptre?
(Dismayed)

My sceptre?

Prophet of Israel, no! . . . It must not.

(Snatching at his mantle)

Stay, do not go! I grovel to your will;

I yield to it as to Omnipotence

And bow to all its divination—all!

SAMUEL

One shall rise then, king of Gibeah,
To strike this Philistine into the earth.

(He goes slowly to the porch.

SAUL sinks back.)

ISHUI

(after a pause)

Oh subtle! . . .

SAUL

Thus he sways me.

ISHUI

Subtle! subtle!

And yet the king endures . . . But come, Adriel,
No use of us is here.

SAUL

Use? . . . Against whom?

What evil are you scenting?

ISHUI

Ask us not.

Yet how it creeps—and how!

SAUL

Speak nakedly;
Not with these swaddling hints and intimations.

ISHUI

(close to him)

This serpent scheme, do you not see it crawl?
Goliath slain, the champion uplifted
On praise, Michal his wife, and then—

SAUL

Say on . . .

ISHUI

The people disaffected and fallen from you?

SAUL

Still on—on.

ISHUI

Or else the champion slain,
Fear on the people, panic, the kingdom's ruin?

SAUL

(loweringly)

The folds slip from me—slowly.

ISHUI

And you see?

Are not deceived by awing prophecies? . . .
What then . . . if tonight . . . a champion offers?

SAUL

(clenching)

If one does . . . if he does . . . and has
But touched this pampered prophet . . .

ISHUI

(quickly)

Now is the king

Himself again at last . . . and can be told!

SAUL

I say if one does—! . . . What is it the king
Can now be told, and has not been? . . . What?

ISHUI

The shepherd David has been seen to go
To Samuel of nights.

SAUL

To Samuel . . . ?

ISHUI

Alone, and secretly.

SAUL

(warily) . . . The folds slip further . . .
To lower depths now than you would have them.
To this you lead me—hatred against David!
To this, with supple envy's easy glide.

ISHUI

I have but told—

SAUL

You have but builded lies,
As ever you are building, and for ever.

(Leaning back)

I'll hear no more against him. (Calling) Abner! . . . No.

(To ABNER who enters)

David, and with his harp.

ABNER

Oh king, till now

He has not come.

SAUL

But dallies, and delays?

ABNER

Time's yet to pass.

SAUL

There is not. Am I king?

He should be swift as eagles . . . Get me wine . . .

Swifter than arrows! . . . Go. And if he still

Delays, I'll send such seekers after him—

(A harp and cries of welcome are heard without)

You see! . . . he has come . . . Bid him enter.

(DAVID, flushed and hurried, appears on the porch. With many pressing forward, he enters playing and singing)

Smiter of hosts, terrible Saul,
Vile on the hills is one who boasts
That none in Israel, none at all,
Will dare for Saul, king Saul!

(Coming down boldly)

Smiter of hosts, is there none
Who at Goliath's soul will run
And strike it to earth, with death's sting,
None for the king, the king?

(Kneels amid applause)

SAUL

(to the throng)

Forego this praise and stand away from him.

It lifts him overmuch. (To DAVID) Why have you dallied?

(Leaves the throne)

DAVID

My lord—?

SAUL

Yes, and delayed!

DAVID

To come to you?

SAUL

Do not smile wonder, mocking!

DAVID

(humbly)

Nay, O king,

I do not mock! Only the birds have wings—
They and the winds. Yet on the hills behind me
I've left a swirl of wonder in the air,
So swiftly did I hurry at your urgency
Out of the fields and folding the far sheep.

SAUL

(dismissing the court)

You have not. You have dallied.

DAVID

Will the king

Avowing so, let lightning gusts of anger
Kindle him thus? . . . Shall I not play for him?

SAUL

I'll not be lulled—falsely.

DAVID

But with a cold

And tiger fury crouching in your eye
Will threaten me, O Saul?

SAUL

(drawing a dagger) They say that you—

DAVID

Who say, my lord? and what?
And when has the truth ever flowed so freely
In palaces
That never an enemy can venom it?

SAUL

I'll slay you—and regretless.

DAVID

Why, O king?

SAUL

You do not fear? but brave me to my breast?

DAVID

Have I done wrong that I should fear the king?
Reed that I am, he could breathe and break me
And cast me into Sheol with a word.
But under the terror of his might have I
Not seen his heart beat justice and beat love?

SAUL

(torn)

I will not listen to them!

Ever they say, this David and this David.

(sheathing his dagger)

But do you think, David, that I must bow

To Samuel? . . . bow and yield to him.

Or lose the kingdom?

DAVID

(flushing) Saul, my lord—

SAUL

You do?

You think it? and believe that he intends—?

DAVID

Surely there is no need for the king's fear!

And dread only deepens a future gulf.

Believe, O Saul, no danger yawns before you,

And wield the throne so well that God Himself

Must not unking you, more than he would cry

The morning star from Heaven: then, I swear,

None else will.

SAUL

Swear? . . . You swear? . . . You, a shepherd?

DAVID

A foolish oath, too quickly from the heart.

Give it no heed, O king; but rather think

Of the Philistines, whose hated fires yonder

Encamp fiercely against our peace,

To make us carrion beneath the sun.

Let us conspire how to bring upon them

A hurricane of ravage, and of ruin.

SAUL

(distraught)

But Samuel—his prophecy—his threat:

It eats in me the food of rest and ease.

And David, hearken . . . In my stead another

Already has been anointed.

DAVID

(abashed)

If it be so,

O king, I am pained by the thought of it . . .
Sometimes beyond enduring.

SAUL

How sometimes?

And wherefore beyond, have you heard it
Before—and know who is chosen against me?
You sup the confidence of Samuel? . . .
Who is he, then, who? . . . I will search
From Nile to farthest Ninevah to find him.
I'll search mountain and wilderness and sea . . .
And when I have, when I seize upon him . . .

(From the porch MICHAL suddenly
enters in joy)

MICHAL

Listen, father, and Oh, David, you;
From Miriam the prophetess I've learned,
Or hope soon to learn . . . But what has happened?
Why is all here so prescient of ill
That a foreboding binds me suddenly?
David, you have not been as sun to him!

DAVID

But Michal will be now.

MICHAL

Father, yes!

For Miriam knows whom Samuel has . . . whom—
(Stops premonitively)

SAUL

(staring)

Why do you cease, and fall so on silence,
As if suddenly Baal-bit . . .? What is it
She knows . . . and of whom?

MICHAL

(confusedly)

David, she . . .

SAUL

Am I to be left gaping, in a mist
Of megrims, while you stammer?

MICHAL

She believes . . .

I cannot say it.

SAUL

What, and why and wherefore?

MICHAL

I do not know. The words I seek shudder
And fall back on my heart, as if the wing
Of some forbidding danger had brushed them.

(as SAUL writhes)

And yet I will, father . . . She can tell
Whom Samuel has anointed, in your stead.

SAUL

(starting up)

Jehovah in my need, then, is with me!
Jehovah, in my need. Speak his name.

MICHAL

She says that he is one who has often—
(The blenched face of DAVID again stays her)

SAUL

Again you cease, tongueless and halting,
And Baal-bit . . . ? Are you flesh of me?

DAVID

(anxiously)

O king—

SAUL

And blood and bone? Are you . . . yet withhold,
Though you have breath to speak?

DAVID

Her lips, my lord,
Would never seal upon a wrong, believe me!

Her hesitance and silence must somehow
 Be sent for the benison of Israel.
 In all the wide troubled realm of duty
 There's no obedience she would hold from you
 Unless—

(ABNER enters and comes down hurriedly)

ABNER

Pardon, O king, and hear. There is haste.

SAUL

I will not. Do you come with vexing too?

ABNER

The Philistines. Some fury is afoot.
 A spy, caught in our gates, refuses speech.

SAUL

Conspiracy of silence! . . . Back, and say
 I'll question him myself. (To DAVID and MICHAL)

But do not think

Your shrinkings and concealings are forgotten.

(He goes with ABNER, his look bent darkly back.

MICHAL sinks to a seat)

DAVID

(turning ardently to her)

Forget? anointing? peril? . . . What are they all
 If Michal, the king's daughter, has done this for me?
 If she, within whose heart and veins flow
 All sympathy and love toward the throne,
 Has so protected me?

MICHAL

(stunned) You . . . are the anointed?

DAVID

I am. But oh, beloved, do not flint
 Your loveliness! I am, but without guile
 In wishing it; as innocent, believe me,
 In will or hope of any envious wrong

As lilies, blowing, of blasphemy; as dew
Upon them is of enmity!

MICHAL

The anointed?

You, whom the king uplifted from the fields?

DAVID

But who am ever faithful to him.

MICHAL

. . . You,

Whom Jonathan loves more than women love?

DAVID

Yet equals not my more than love for him!
So hear before you judge. He is aware,
He, the king's heir, of my anointing,
But knows that it was poured upon my head
From the inspired cruse of Samuel.
For Israel it dripped upon me—so
For Israel is sacred till I die—
Or till high oath and Askalon and all
The cities of Philistia, our foe,
Shall be as dust blown on the desert wind,
Or lie under the stars, peopleless
And still, with great Goliath's laughter hushed.—
Will you not understand?

MICHAL

(struggling)

Thus it is

You've breathed upon my heart, like a flame
Of moonlit incense, seeking to burn away
The barriers . . . till now, with anger gone,
Only my tears fall!

DAVID

Oh do not weep!

Each tear welling and trembling on your lids
Will flood me from all duty save the course
Of your delight!

MICHAL

(rising)

Sudden fury were better!
And fierce tempest against you, since it is
My father you would destroy—you with Samuel
Seeking to steal the kingdom!

DAVID

(bitterly)

Can so false

A charge and accusal come from Michal?
Surely she does not mean so to wound me?

(Getting no answer)

Delirious wings of hope have fluttered up
Within me, then, I see, only to fall!

(Rises and turns to go)

MICHAL

Ah no! no! . . . I—!

DAVID

Peace to you—and joy.

MICHAL

I cannot let you go, thus, for if—

(Moves to embrace him, but suddenly stops dismayed;
for DOEG and MERAB appear at the curtains, then
vanish)

MICHAL

You saw? Doeg and Merab!

DAVID

(heedless)

Does it matter?

Or would it now, were they an evil host
Of night-unshrouded dead?
Under the skies there's but one need for us—
That you will understand!

MICHAL

But Merab loves you,
Has told her love to Ahinoam the queen.
And Doeg hates you, since for me he's mad.

DAVID

Why should we care, though their hate and love
Were fierce as winds that seek to gather up
The desert for their blast, or deep as Sheol.
There's naught to fear, if Michal will believe
That it is not the kingdom I desire,
But only her!
For so it has been, beloved, since the day
I first beheld you,
Beautiful under a tamarisk at noon
Amid the king's servants—while I led
My flock down to the brook side to drink.
For since that day and hour—

MICHAL

Do not say more!

DAVID

I've lived in the sweet wonder of a dream!
The moulded light and fragrant miracle,
Body of you and soul, so enthralled me
That when you left me alone there and lonely
My heart fell abysmal into despair
As into the grave . . . Then the prophet Samuel
Called me to him strangely, for the anointing,
And once again my heart sprang as the sun
Toward you. Then I was called to play for the king—
And in this hall where golden seraphim
Shine out, where the night silence strung me tense,
I waited, shepherd-timid, and you came,
You—to try my skill at song for the king!

MICHAL

(Caught up against her will)

And then, forgetting all, we were swept
By music and the wings of our desire—

DAVID

Far from love's simple birth toward its bourne,
Where though dismayed you would not, even tonight,

Betray to Saul the secret of my anointing.
Say why—truly.

MICHAL .

Shall I? . . . and reveal
As well how Miriam the prophetess
Has told me—she foresees—

DAVID

Some joy for us?
Some unborn joy? O, if it is, speak!

MICHAL

(changing)
And join with destiny against my father?
Dethrone my mother?

DAVID

Never so—wrongly!

MICHAL

Swear then, that conspiracy upon
Its tide never shall lift you!

DAVID

To the throne?

I do—whatever oath God desires.
For if the throne shall come—

MICHAL

"If"? Not "if"!

Surrender this anointing! spurn it, say
You never will be king though Israel
Go kingless forever!

DAVID

And by such spurning
Offend the God we trust in? . . . I must not.

MICHAL

Then I must hate and scorn you!

DAVID

Michal!

MICHAL

And will!

But to rule over Israel you care,
Not for the peace of it.

DAVID

And Michal cares,

It seems, only to wrong me bitterly.

(Proudly)

But let her hear this, an oath Jehovah
Now bids me swear against the Philistines
Whose fires lap up our peace with bloody tongue:
Before three days not one of them shall burn!

MICHAL

(half awed)

But with a breath you perhaps will quench them,
A mere breath and boasting? . . . I would as soon
Believe that from the shepherd's sling you wear
A multitude should flee! (Suddenly tearful) And
you shall learn

A daughter to a father may be true,
Though love must be forgone until she dies.

(Has turned to leave but a turmoil without stays her)

(JONATHAN enters, sees DAVID and goes to
embrace him)

JONATHAN

David!

DAVID

My friend! My Jonathan! What news?

JONATHAN

I've heard, great heart, how yesterday amid
The soldiers . . . But . . . what so discomfords Michal?
(She has gone, suppressing tears)

DAVID

The anointing. She knows.

JONATHAN

And turns from you?

DAVID

Alas! . . . But, what brings you? What turmoil
 Of misty distress is now in the camp?
 Has some new fear of the Philistines arisen?
 A fiercer challenge from this sounding giant?
 My friend, you must not bid me wait longer
 To strike . . .!

JONATHAN

The king has ordered a spy here,
 Who first must be compelled to give us news.

DAVID

Fresh peril indeed is up then?

JONATHAN

Should it prove so,
 I cannot let you rush too rashly on it.

DAVID

But can endure, day after day, to see
 Our hills and valleys stained, and starved of peace?
 Better were it that any in Israel
 Should give the last drop of blood in him
 To death—and desecration of the worm.

JONATHAN

But Saul, my father, is now so unstrung—
 (Breaks off, for the turmoil grows and SAUL strides in
 with SAMUEL, AHINOAM and all the court, save
 MICHAL, follow. The SPY between soldiers is among
 them)

SAUL

(Mounting the throne angrily)
 He will not speak, but scorns me, and his lips
 Bitterly grind and grapple. Set him forth.
 (The SPY is pushed forth roughly)
 Tighten his bonds up further. He shall yield
 To torture's twisting. Now, vile Philistine,
 Will you reveal your people's purpose toward us?

THE SPY

(anguished)

Baal! . . .

SAUL

Tighten the torture more . . .! . . . Now, will you?

THE SPY

New forces have arrived—

SAUL

Say on.

THE SPY

Full armed,

And numberless as the peaks of Arabah.

Unless before tomorrow's night some one of you

Shall go and slay Goliath . . . Gods! . . . the pain! . . .

Unless you do—

SAUL

Still on!

THE SPY

All Gibeah

Shall be attacked . . .

And even sucking babes—put to sword.

AHINOAM

(amid consternation)

All Gibeah?

A WOMAN

My little ones? . . . No, no!

(She rushes out in terror)

SAMUEL

Then, Saul of Gibeah, one thing and one

Alone is to be done. A champion

Must break this beetling Giant down to death.

SAUL

(weaving to and fro)

There is none!

SAMUEL

Call and see. I order it.

SAUL

Then who will dare against him? (Silence) See you, now,
None will.

SAMUEL

Abner, you?

ABNER

For me, or any,

It would be death merely.

SAMUEL

(turning)

You then, Doeg?

Chief servant of the king?

DOEG

(shrugging)

And why me?

Had I a mother out of Israel?

I am an alien, an Edomite.

SAUL

None will, I tell you, none. So—

DAVID

O king! . . .

(Pushing to the throne humbly yet ardently)

Surely the shame and terror of this evil
Cannot forever be endured by us!
This Philistine, with insult and mockery,
With vaunting vanity and smiting laughter,
Has boasted up to Baal, his god, too long!
And now all Israel, he swears, shall bleed
And be no more, if none of us will meet him.

(Kneeling suddenly)

I'm but a shepherd, as the king knows,
And have as yet achieved no mightier thing
Than throttle a kid out of the lion's throat;
So little does it behoove that I thrust in
Where battle captains falter and refuse.

But this is past all pride of rank or station;
 Some one of us must venture forth against
 This bloody giant.

ISHUI

Ha! and you will?

DOEG

You?

(derisively)

A sheep-shearing harp-twanger?

ISHUI

You?

DAVID

Have I thrown fear and doom at the feet
 Of the king, that you hound about me thus,
 As dogs ready to leap?

DOEG

It is a plot!

(More loudly, at the throne)

A plot, O king, in which he would be slain
 And cause the kingdom to fall away from you—
 As we foretold!

ISHUI

Yea, a plot, by which—

JONATHAN

(pushing forward)

O Saul, it is not! but is rather
 A courage that has sprung to our aid
 Divine and seraphic out of night,
 A bravery and beautiful to God!

DOEG

How do we know? Let him draw a sword
 Against some one of us—and so test it.
 What surety can he give against defeat?
 Hear, O king, what pledge that—

SAMUEL

Saul . . . ! . . . Hear me!

(Has stridden down to the throne, aweingly. But MICHAL,
appearing on the porch, stays his words)

MICHAL

Open and let me enter! Open! Open!

(Making her way to the throne)

Father, is it true, as this spy says,
That Israel must suffer bloody ruin
And desolation, if no champion
Shall go forth at dawn to meet Goliath?

SAMUEL

I answer for him. Yea!

MICHAL

Then no longer,

Prophet of God, will I stand against
Your wish of yesterday, but now will lay
The first sacrifice upon the altar.

(Facing about fiercely)

Listen, all you who bear the sword and shield:
To whosoever shall strike Goliath down
Shall go the hand of Michal, the king's daughter!
(The throng murmur, pleased)

MERAB

(To MICHAL)

This is a trick to get him!

DOEG

(To SAUL)

Aye, a treason!

Another serpent coiling of their plot,
Another crafty thrust against the throne!

ISHUI

Yes, O king, see it! Michal too
Has joined in the conspiracy against you.

(MICHAL stands astonished. A brief pause. Then a
CAPTAIN enters and pushes through to the throne)

THE CAPTAIN

O king, bid me to speak!

SAUL

(tortured)

Some vexing more?

THE CAPTAIN

New fear is on the host, and mutiny
Will lift its head—unless Goliath's slain
And hope springs up anew.

DAVID

Let the king choose then
And bid me go forth, ere longer waiting
Shall fester to disaster!

SAMUEL

(adjuringly)

Yea, O Saul,

And Michal for his reward, if victory
Attends him! But refuse, and certain evil
Shall henceforth attend *you*—
And haunting memory beyond the tomb.

SAUL

(beaten)

Let him, then! Let him! On the field
Of Ephes-Dammin . . . But I am not blind.

(To ABNER)

Prepare the host and let him, on the morrow;
Proclaim it aloud to the Philistines.

(rising)

But I am king, remember! . . . I am king!

(He again stalks from the hall, and many follow,
murmuring. Finally only DAVID and MICHAL are left)

MICHAL

(turning on him)

As by a leash tied to a slave's nose-ring,
I've been led on, by love of you, to this?

DAVID

(stung)

Do not believe or say so, beloved.
 Of Samuel's intent to pledge you to me
 I knew not until this hour revealed it.
 For Israel alone I would have dared
 To meet Goliath—and all Philistia!

(A trumpet sounds as he looks appealingly at her. Then
 soldiers shouting his name appear on the porch)

DAVID

(when she does not answer)

For Israel! Jehovah and Israel!

(Grasping his sling, he runs out shouting among them.
 The Philistine fires flare up as the shouting reaches them.
 MICHAL stands strickenly)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I: The royal tent of SAUL pitched on a hill of the battle field of Ephes-Dammin. The tent is of black embroidered with various warlike designs. To one side on a dais are the throne chairs of SAUL and AHINOAM, also javelins and a harp. A wide tent door at the rear reveals on the opposite hill the routed camp of the Philistines—with what appears to be Goliath slain in the midst of it. Other hills and the sky stretch beyond.

By a small table left, her back to the battle field, sits MERAB, in cold anger. AHINOAM and several ecstatic women look out toward SAUL, DAVID, JONATHAN and the army, returning victorious and shouting.

A WOMAN

See, see, the host! They come!

A SECOND

See! They come!

Over the shining brook, amid hosannas!
 An avalanche, shouting high hosannas!

THE FIRST

And now they reach the rushes!

A THIRD

And the servants,

Bearing Goliath's head upon a charger!
The rocks cry out with echoes! Oh and see,
The people waving palms!

THE SECOND

High green branches
Torn from the trees! The waving of them, oh!

THE FIRST

And David in the midst of all, triumphant,
Between the king and Jonathan!
His glory shall sound afar to generations
Of all the world! Hear them! Oh, hear!
It is a sea of shouting.

AHINOAM

(smiling) Which you crave
To plunge into? Go then; for you may.
(As they run forth rapturously she turns about)

MERAB

Mother!

AHINOAM

Only you, Merab, are left here,
Brooding, sullen and bitter.

MERAB

Where is Michal?

AHINOAM

I do not know.

MERAB

Why did you let my father
Pledge her to him?

AHINOAM

You are Michal's sister,
And pledged to Adriel.

MERAB

Against my will!

And if I do not love him—there is riches!

If he is Sodom-bitter to me—riches!

AHINOAM

But for the kingdom—and your own weal.

MERAB

No kingdom is to a woman as her love!

AHINOAM

(gravely)

Does David indeed so enthrall you?

MERAB

Beyond

All other wants or dreams—though he never

Has sought me with any murmur or desire:

And now is Michal's . . . for Goliath's death,

Michal's today, unless . . .

AHINOAM

(sharply)

I'll have no thwarting

Today, or revenge from you, remember!

The king's word is given.

Too near in you ever were love and hate.

(She turns and leaves the tent. The shouting
continues)

(DOEG slips in furtively)

DOEG

(To MERAB)

Listen, and speak low. I have news.

MERAB

Of nothing—as your wont is?

DOEG

Of a way

For us to triumph yet.

MERAB

Go raise Goliath

Up from the dead, then come with triumph talk.

DOEG

Such mockery is childish.

MERAB

I'll grow wise then,

Listening to sage Doeg!

DOEG

Then learn first

That Saul is like a leopard pent between
 Wonder of David and quick jealousy
 This wild praise of the people wakes in him.

MERAB

Wisdom indeed! A stale wind blowing
 From every housetop!

DOEG

This, then, is not:

I have disposed the timbrel-player Judith
 To taunt the king further when he comes
 By shouting weak praise only; but to David
 A lavish overpraise, as to a king.

MERAB

(rising, thinking)

That may not come amiss—if more be added,
 And more shall be! I'll praise our harp-shepherd
 As he was never, nor shall be again!

(Takes out a dagger)

DOEG

Like any fool, with that?

MERAB

(arrogantly)

Give me the phial

You got for me.

DOEG
The poison?

MERAB

Come. Come.

DOEG

Not till—

MERAB

Give it, I say. Then watch and learn.

(She takes it, poisons the dagger, then continues)

Now, where is the wench Judith?

DOEG

Waiting without.

I've bidden her to stand beside the tent
And listen, and when David is left alone
With Michal, as he will be,
To enter quickly and ravish him with kisses
As if it were her wont. Michal once jealous,
And I have sowed suspicions—

MERAB

This is well planted

And only needs watering
To bring forth thistles, which not she but we,
Like starved sheep, have eaten, until now.

(She moves, pleased, to the door, and goes as he does)

(Shouts for DAVID, rising without, grow louder. Then timbrelers pass the door, dancing and singing. SAMUEL and the PRIESTS follow, bearing the Ark. SAUL, AHINOAM, DAVID, and JONATHAN enter, with all the Court. GOLIATH'S head on a charger is set down. Amid shouting and waving of palms SAUL mounts the throne, AHINOAM with him)

A WOMAN

(stepping forth suddenly)

Our little ones are saved! Hosanna! Joy!

(She kisses DAVID'S hand)

JONATHAN

(thrilled)

Woman, your lips should know an angel word,
 Or seraph-syllables new-sung to God!
 Earth has not any rare enough for this!

(Turning)

David, my brother!

DAVID

Jonathan, my friend!

While there is any love, know mine for you!

JONATHAN

Then am I happy as no friend was ever,
 Or ever shall be! . . . People, look upon him!
 (SAUL sways jealously)

THE THRONG

David! David!

JONATHAN

Never before did Israel

Rise to this peak of glory!

DAVID

(troubled)

Nay, I beg you!

JONATHAN

(unheeding)

Therefore I offer honor to him and praise
 Without stint—honor none can deny!

(Loosing his robe and girdle)

In gold and purple, this my own, I clothe him,
 And clasp him—!

THE THRONG

Yea, hosanna! David! David!

SAUL

(starting up livid)

Am I to stifle, full-of-lauding fools,
 Under this breath of ravishment unceasing?
 Is this not more than praise? Has he not reached
 The skies on it?

DAVID

Yea, O king, unworthily!

SAUL

Had *I* ever this rapture from my son?
 Ever this worshiping of utterance?

AHINOAM

(appeasingly)

Let not my lord be troubled. It will pass.

DOEG

(derisively)

And Saul, the king, with it?

DAVID

(to SAUL)

Jonathan's soul

But overflows, upon his friend, thy servant!

DOEG

O! Oh-ho! Oh-ho!

SAUL

(slowly)

Why do you laugh?

DOEG

Thy *servant*, Saul? Upon his friend, thy *servant*?
 And whither will the overflow lift him?

JUDITH

(without, suddenly)

King Saul, in his might, has slain thousands,
 But *David his ten thousands!*

DOEG

(quickly)

Does the king hear?

JUDITH

But David ten! David tens of thousands!

JONATHAN

(intervening)

The king cannot be roused thus by Doeg,
 As dust is by the wind.

SAUL

(half rising) . . . I will strike!
 I'll burst the bonds of priests—and prophecies!
 (Seizes a javelin)
 I'll smite—wherever I will!

JONATHAN

Father! No!
 Or till you die you will regret that on
 Your hand a shrivelling palsy did not fall,
 An impotence to stay it—and save you
 From shedding innocent blood! (As SAUL desists)
 That is well.
 Wisdom and justice are a king's true might.

DAVID

(to SAUL)
 Can I believe that Israel's great king,
 Who once was kindlier than kindest are,
 Would pour out my life, for but a word,
 The wanton idle word a woman speaks? . . .
 Some enemy has put into her mouth
 This strategem of fevered overpraise.
 (He looks at DOEG and ISHUI; there is a pause. Then SAUL
 strides from the tent, followed as usual)

DOEG

(low—passing DAVID)
 This is not all, sheep out of Bethlehem;
 Goliath's dead—

DAVID

But not all villainy?
 (DAVID, MERAB and MICHAL are left alone)

MERAB

(as if contritely)
 Alas, David, that in this hour of joy
 My father is overfilled with wrath for you,

And not with recompense. I am ashamed.
 What can I say, for him or for myself,
 Except to ask forgiveness?

DAVID

(warily)

Merab asks?

MERAB

As humbly as she can, conquered at last
 By your great victory for Israel.
 Noble it was, and unbelievable
 As dawn! The sudden lightning of it sprang
 Glorious in your veins!

DAVID

. . . The poor thanks

I have for such homage seem unseemly.

MERAB

Grant me as a remembrance then, and as
 A token of the peace new-born between us,
 One drop—from your veins—upon this blade,
 (draws the dagger)
 Which I will offer up then in the temple.

DAVID

(not taking it)

I see that Merab mocks me.

MERAB

Nay, my homage

Is all too little for a just requital.

DAVID

Could I believe it, I would—

MERAB

As I live,

No perfume from a vial of India poured
 Could be so prized; no miracle of dew,
 To a lone pilgrim wandering and lost
 Upon the desert's thirst.

DAVID

(yielding) . . . It shall be then.

(taking the dagger he slowly rolls back his sleeve. But drawing his own instead, pricks with it)

MERAB

(defeatedly)

Shepherd!

DAVID

I was to be a flattered fool then,

And prick the poison in?

(Sheathes both daggers)

In the king's tent the daughter of the king

Should know—that cunning has been seen before.

(She goes with chagrin. He turns gently to MICHAL)

DAVID

Fairest of all my hopes, no hindrance now

Is left between our hearts and happiness.

The vaunting of this victory is done.

We are alone at last.

MICHAL

. . . And lonelier!

DAVID

Why do you say so now, and so aloofly?

For Israel I strove today, but oh

For you, who were about me as a host

Of armed and mighty angels triumphing.

MICHAL

(coldly)

I thank you.

DAVID

Only that? and only as

You would the merest slave tending upon you?

(sadly)

If so, the victory given me today

Is empty and spent of glow, spent and void

As scattered ashes that have burnt in vain.

(Sits down wearily)

MICHAL

DAVID . . . No! . . . No! . . . It was divine!

(Goes to him)

And had I cried my joy, earth would have burst

To Eden under me with blossoming.

So wonderful a deed was never done,

So fair a springing of salvation up!

Would I could seize the stars out of the heavens

To crown you with.

DAVID

Then am I doubly crowned!

(Has risen joyfully)

MICHAL

With but a shepherd's sling you crossed the brook

And from its watery bed drew a stone;

Then mounting up the hill heedlessly,

To where the great Philistine cried,

You flung it deep upon his taunting brain.

DAVID

This is the victory then, not his death,

To be so praised by Michal! Oh beloved,

(taking her in his arms)

Let us now seal it with—

MICHAL

Ah, no, we cannot!

(Distressed again)

My father is even more appeaseless now;

And if we—

DAVID

Far too long have we endured

The severance of waiting and of doubt!

Let them be shaken from us, and our souls

Be fused wholly to one!

MICHAL

And then broken
Apart again, by worse that would arise?

DAVID

The king has promised . . . !

MICHAL

Yet this victory
But severs us the more. (Freeing herself)
For hear how
The people still lift your praises yonder.
Almost they would have made you king today,
Despite the peril of it.

DAVID

But ere tomorrow
I shall be only a singer of songs again,
A shepherd of the hills; and ere the harvest
Less than a gleam in their forgotten peril.

MICHAL

Would it were so!

DAVID

It is!

MICHAL

No! But all things
Seem beckoning the realm into your hands.

DAVID

Should we not then obey the sacred trend
Of God's divinity toward its goal?

MICHAL

Prophets have been deceived; and Samuel
Perhaps has been in this.

DAVID

So be it then.

Till time or fate shall change you, I will wait.

MICHAL

And I may tell my father of the anointing?

Surely if it has come to you unsought

And undesired—

DAVID

He would not believe so;

But would unloose murder and hate upon me,

Or instant exile from you . . . afar!

MICHAL

You wrong him.

DAVID

He is Saul.

MICHAL

I will plead with him.

DAVID

Has the wind's wrath ever been dissuaded

From blighting flowers?

MICHAL

(coldly)

All is as it was then!

Your stroke today against Goliath had

No love of me in it!

DAVID

Over the battle

The thought of Michal called to me like trumpets,

Or like the surge of song the priests hear

Within the Holy of Holies.

MICHAL

You but use me—

A love-pawn in the game of your ambition!

DAVID

Bitterness still now, in spite of all?

MICHAL

You snared me to you, subtly and cunningly;
With Samuel netted fears about my father
Till I was pledged to you—paltrily!

DAVID

If Michal indeed believed so, I would cast
The beauteous pledge she gave out of my heart,
As an enchantment dead.

MICHAL

(forced on) Which but proves then
It never was enchantment—else you could not
So easily disavow it! And proves also
The whispers I have heard of you . . . are true!

DAVID

Who now has—?

MICHAL

It is said that you play
Your harp and sing to others in the palace,
And dally with them!

DAVID

(simply) There is only Michal,
And gentleness clad once her every grace.
(She seems about to relent, but a laugh is heard.
It is Judith who enters boldly)

JUDITH

(gliding intimately to DAVID)
I could not wait longer, beloved, to bring
My pride and praise to you.

DAVID

(staring astonished) To me, woman?

MICHAL

(to JUDITH, indignantly)

To him? . . . you? . . . here?

JUDITH

Daughter of Saul,

I too love him.

MICHAL

You!

JUDITH

And would be loved,

Or more than loved, by him,

Were I like you a princess, not a timbreler.

(Again close to DAVID)

Beautiful on the hills were your feet,

Beloved lion of the tribe of Judah!

The mighty Philistine, a brazen tower,

Fell tottering in blood down to earth.

DAVID

(pushing her off)

Your flesh, wanton, the heat and myrrh of it,

Take it away!

JUDITH

It is no longer fair then to David,

Now that he has a princess? He forgets,

In the triumphant hour of his glory,

His lowly handmaiden? (Feigning grief) I

will go then.

Too rashly did I come, remembering.

(hurries off)

MICHAL

(nursing her chagrin)

A timbrel-player then, a mere dancer,

Is one of them?

DAVID

Until this hapless hour
I've never looked upon her, except as
The king's handmaiden.

MICHAL

And will the king suppose so?

DAVID

Surely the heart of Michal will not let
Itself be set adrift on such a doubt?

MICHAL

No! . . . but on a sea of certainty,
Now that I know at last what's to be done.
(Turning, she goes. He sits down desolately)
(AHINOAM enters)

AHINOAM

David, the king . . . But you . . . what now?

DAVID

(has risen) O queen,
But life—that ever tunes our heart strings
To ecstasy,
Then with a harsh and cruel hand snaps them.

AHINOAM

Too well do I, a queen, understand.
Our fairest hopes and dreams are but as bubbles
Rimming the cup of bitterness.
But Michal . . . ?

DAVID

She is no longer
Michal to me! Only a king's daughter—
But tell me of the king . . . Is his favor
Still turned from me?

AHINOAM

He's coming here again,
And with the Evil Spirit stronger on him.
He must be quieted, as only you can.

Take up your harp then and draw from it
 The solace he loves, of waterbrooks at evening,
 When there is ebb of sorrow and of toil
 And all things go to rest. Oh, if you could
 But heal him fully!

DAVID

(longingly) Then would I be—

AHINOAM

(hearing steps)

At once!

(Giving the harp)

And God be with you. I am sore distraught.

(DAVID taking the harp sits down to play)

(SAUL enters slowly and goes to the throne.

JONATHAN, ISHUI, MICHAL, and many drift in)

AHINOAM

(after a time)

My lord, shall David sing to you?

SAUL

Let him.

AHINOAM

Of joy or sorrow?

SAUL

He shall choose, not you.

DAVID

Of sorrow then, if it shall please the king.

(Sits and plays a moment, then, singing)

Oh heart of woe,

Heart of unrest and broken as a reed!

Oh heart whose flow

Is anguish and all the bitterness of need!

Oh heart as a roe,

Heart as a hind upon the mountains fleeing

The arrow wounds of being,

Be still, O heart, and rest, and do not bleed!

(as SAUL bows his head)

Oh days of life,
 Days that are driven swift and wild from the womb!
 Oh days of strife,
 Days that are torn of trouble, trod of doom.
 Oh days so rife,
 Days of desire on deserts spread unending,
 The burning skies o'erbending,
 Oh days, our peace, our victory, is the tomb!
 (Plays to a throbbing close, then sits silent)

SAUL

(lifting his head in tears)

David, your song—

DAVID

My lord—?

SAUL

It stills my sorrow,
 And pours upon my heart anointing peace.

DAVID

(joyfully)

After so long, the king is kind again?
 Once more his gracious spirit softly moves
 Amid his troubled thoughts?

SAUL

With love of you!

DAVID

Then shelter indeed will spring up again
 To cover me gently.

SAUL

Ever it shall!

(MICHAL'S face hardens)

Loveliest have you been among my days
 And singing weary madness from my brain—
 And I have ill repaid you.

MICHAL

(fiercely)

Ill repaid?

Can a mere song so deceive a king?

SAUL

(staring)

How's this? Do you—?

MICHAL

The king's weakest ass

Could speak more wisely than the king is doing.

Was ever any traitor ill repaid?

SAUL

You too call him traitor?

MICHAL

He is false—

And faithless—!

SAUL

You too say it, as do Ishui

And Doeg? You, his betrothed?

MICHAL

Drive him away,

Out of the land! Out of Israel!

For he is one who—

DAVID

Michal! . . .

MICHAL

Who has joined

With Samuel the prophet and intends—

DAVID

(seeing her falter)

Michal, it seems, intends to tear away

The tendrils of her love, and leave only

The rank weeds of penitence to strangle

Her heart in days to come?

SAUL

Let her speak!

DAVID

Instead, O Saul, I will speak, for her,
 Words long overdue. She seeks to tell you
 Whom Samuel has anointed.

SAUL

(starting up)

Then she knows?

DAVID

By chance—as by chance the chrism came!
 Upon my head the prophet's oil was poured,
 Though never did I seek it, and indeed
 Would it had never come, and vow that never
 Against your throne will I lift up—

DOEG

(triumphant)

Rebellion?

Ho! Ho-ho! Ah-ho!

ISHUI

The truth, at last!

(Overturns GOLIATH'S head)

JUDITH

(again from without)

A thousand Saul has slain—but David *ten!*

(SAMUEL appears at the door)

Ten thousand of our foes, *David ten!*

SAUL

(with another javelin)

Omnipotence shall not withhold me now—
 But he shall die.

JONATHAN

(between them) Father!

SAUL

Stand away.

(flings the javelin)

JONATHAN

(quickly)

David, are you hurt?

DAVID

A scratch only.

JONATHAN

Flee, then!

MICHAL

(shaken) What have I done!

JONATHAN

To the wilderness!

SAUL

(with another javelin)

He shall not, and not you nor any other
Shall spare him now.

SAMUEL

(coming down)

Saul! Murderous king! . . .

What is it you would do? Strike him down,

The Lord's anointed down from the day

To the cold waiting hunger of the worm?

(SAUL'S hand quails)

DAVID

(retreating)

Farewell, O king! But from this hour henceforth

May God, and God alone, judge between us.

(He turns swiftly and escapes, covered by SAMUEL. SAUL,
trembling, lets the javelin fall. MICHAL sinks to her knees, her
face in her hands)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 2: A savage mountain cliff in the wilderness of Engedi some weeks later. On either side gray crags rise ruggedly and sink away precipitously across the back. The height is reached by clefts in the rocks from the sides and on either side is a cave opening, rearward. Visible in the distance is the blue of the Dead Sea, and still beyond are the purple shores of Moab. During the Act, the scene grows crimson—toward sunset.

On a pallet of skins at the cliff's edge David tosses feverishly. Three of his followers, and a lad who serves him, are gathered together forward, ragged, hungry, and hunted, in altercation over a barley cage.

DAVID

(weakly)

Water! . . . the fever fills me and I thirst.

Water! . . .

FIRST FOL.

Listen, he calls.

DAVID

Water! I thirst!

THE LAD

(taking a waterskin)

At once, my lord! I come . . . Ah!—it is empty,
No drop is left! . . . They've drunk it all from you.
But I will brim it in the valley—soon.

(He goes. DAVID sinks back)

SECOND FOL.

(to first)

You drank it then!

FIRST

And should I thirst, not he?

Give me the bread.

SECOND

If it would strangle you.

FIRST

I'll have it!

SECOND

(refusing) Or betray him to the king?
It is the last. Already you have eaten,
And we are here upon a wilderness.

FIRST

No matter. I'll not starve.

THE THIRD

He speaks right!

Why should we follow a shepherd, like mere goats,
And die upon a hundred desert crags?
The prophecy, promising him the throne,
Is vain—or false, though it is Samuel's.
I'll trust in it no more.

FIRST

By Baal, nor I!

THE SECOND

Nor I—but by *Jehovah* I swear it.
For David never intends to gather a force,
Though Saul has hunted us and driven us
Almost into Philistia for shelter.
He lies there brooding upon a woman—
And not upon a throne!

SECOND

Peace. He stirs.

FIRST

I've fields to till at home—and my own herds,
And mean to tell him so.

DAVID

(as before) What hour is this?
(Half rises)

THE SECOND

Late afternoon.

DAVID

We must seek news again.

(Comes down desperately)

Implacably they stare unto each other,

This rock and stony sky! . . . Who will go?

THE THIRD

Have not Abishai, Abiathar,

And others gone for news—and none returned?

DAVID

Of all I sent, not one!

THE THIRD

We are not swine then—

And life's but once. So we will follow you

No longer, hungered and rewarded never,

And perilously ever.

DAVID

(looking at them)

It is well.

(Takes off a bracelet)

This was a gift of Saul. In it find ease.

(Hands it; then says to FIRST:)

This ring was Jonathan's. The jewel tells

Still of the ruddy haven of his heart

Where often I have sheltered!

He pressed it on my hand the day we leapt

Into each other's love, as deepest friends.

(Hands it; then turns to SECOND)

This chain—

SECOND

I want it not!

DAVID

You've served me well.

In Sidon or the marts of Tyre its gold

And gems would bring riches.

SECOND

I want only

A woman—one I loved—in Gibeah.
 She was to be my wife . . . Her face at night
 Weeps ever in my dreams . . . The prophecy
 You build upon is vain.

DAVID

(wistfully) When the right hand
 Of God is hid from us, all things seem vain.

THE SECOND

We suffer—upon this cliff.

DAVID

Go in peace then

To better days—and without blame from me.
 May palms by sweet rivers be your portion.

(As they go, he continues forsakenly):

A desolation left—of rock and air,
 Of barren sea and bitterness as vast!
 You have bereft me, Saul! . . . and Michal, you!

(Then, gazing off)

My flesh cries for oblivion—to sink
 Unwaking away into the night, where no
 Tears are, but only soothing tides of sleep.

(After a pause, bitterly)

No, no! . . . not for oblivion until
 I've taught this king . . . ! . . . But peace, peace,
 my spirit,

And let revenge be stifled in your deeps . . .
 As pants the hart for the waterbrook, so I!

(He goes up the cliff, and again looks away. Then bowing slowly
 he enters the cave right)

(A cloud darkens the sky and the LAD returns. MICHAL is
 with him, disguised well in rags. She looks around pityingly)

MICHAL

This rock then is the place?

LAD

Yes, Princess Michal.

He hides there, in the caves.

MICHAL

Through want and fever?

In hunger too and thirst—by day and night?

LAD

I bring him water, often.

MICHAL

(gratefully)

Little lad!

But did my messenger not come to him
 With word of me and tell him my repentance?
 And how, because of it, the king, my father,
 Had plighted me to Phalti, a new lord?
 But that I would escape and join him here?

LAD

He heard no thing at all—only the tales
 I told of Moab, my own land . . . But hearken!

(DAVID'S harp is heard)

The song he sings often! The words say
 "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want."

MICHAL

(half to herself)

I'll speak to him . . . As a leper could I,
 Until I know whether he still is kind?

LAD

Why must he not know you?

MICHAL

Do not ask,

But leave the waterskin and go apart.

(The LAD obeys. She conceals her face in her hair—then cries
 "Unclean!" The harp ceases)

DAVID

(appearing from the cave)
Who cries, thus, unclean?

MICHAL

Pity, I pray!

DAVID

Poor leper in this wilderness, who are you?

MICHAL

One outcast—and forlorn!

DAVID

Then you have come

To one more sorely outcast than yourself,
One who has only this lone void for dwelling,
This solitude and sun, this sterile scene
Of leaden desolation that makes mad,
Or would, did not the cool rock-shadows come
To ease him, or by night the quiet stars
That sink like shining dew into the west.

(Gazing at her)

And yet, in pity of you, here is my cloak,
Less tattered than your own. And too, this chain,
Of Ophir gold—all that is left to me
Of happier days—that will not come again.

MICHAL

And wherefore not, my lord?

DAVID

A king's daughter,

Who gave the chain, unfaithfully betrayed me:
So from my memory it should be banished
For ever—as she is.

MICHAL

(involuntarily) Do not say so!

DAVID

(startled)

And why, leper? You speak as one—

MICHAL

(shrinking)

Unclean!

DAVID

A spy? It cannot be that as a spy
Of Saul you have crept here? No. My brain
Is thick with fever. Almost I was tempted
To seize upon your pitiful contagion.
Go then, at once—or I may do it. Go!

(She hurries off, frightened. He stoops for the waterskin.
As he lifts it JONATHAN enters)

JONATHAN

(low)

David, my friend!

DAVID

Jonathan, is it you?

(Drops the waterskin)

It cannot be, after so long? . . . Oh is it?

JONATHAN

After so long! And overjoyed beyond
All earthly words again to embrace you!
How is it with you? Well? Or have the days
Of your unhappy exile . . . ? . . . But, no;
I must withhold from questioning until
I tell you how the king, camping about
This crag, has seized your followers and hopes
To learn soon where you are—and destroy you.

DAVID

Almost I would he might, so ill am I!

JONATHAN

Not so! do not say it. He may relent
And turn from this pursuit. For surely somehow
I shall prevail upon him . . . But if not,
I'll shoot an arrow here into the air
And send a lad hurrying after it
And cry "beyond"—meaning for you to flee.

DAVID

As, to repay your love, I will, again,
Though weary unto death of this wilderness.

JONATHAN

When love needs pay it is no longer love
But only barter.

DAVID

And yours is all I ask!
But if I am ever king, as is foretold,
You shall be king upon a throne above me;
For you shall rule the secrets of my heart,
You and your children and your children's children,
Unto my end of days!

JONATHAN

Then no sceptre

Or crown shall I crave, save that friendship;
And no man or might shall come between us
On earth or in the after years of Sheol!—
But now delay is peril!

DAVID

Till we meet then,

In seasons that shall end this suffering.
(About to part they are startled by a cry)

DAVID

(listening)

Was that a jackal? No! But the signal
Agreed on with Abishai! . . . He's coming.

(At a cleft right, looking down)

Abiathar is with him too, wounded
And staggering and torn; his priestly ephod
All bloody and ungirdled. Go, Jonathan.

(Alone as the two enter)

Abishai? Abiathar? what now?
More of evil has befallen us?

(As they sink down)

Are you pursued?

ABIATHAR

(hoarsely) Water! . . .

DAVID

The skin is by you.

(They seize it and drink)

What burning desperation fills your eyes,
Breathing hate and abhorrence? Has the king
Again—?

ABIATHAR

May he stifle under the skies
He fouls so! May the blackest scorpions
Of terror and remorse sting his soul!

DAVID

If you have tidings worse than those I know—

ABIATHAR

He's dead! Is that worse?

DAVID

Who?

ABIATHAR

Samuel!

And prophecy is hushed in the land!
For Saul, believing the priests gathered at Nob
Were plotting with you—

ABISHAI

Has had them slain—all!

DAVID

(pale)

Your father too? and mine?

ABIATHAR

Stricken and shorn,

They both were driven forth, with our kindred,
Into the land of Moab. And now Saul,
With Merab, whelp of him, has hurried hither,
Delirious for our blood.

DAVID

I have heard so.

ABIATHAR

(challengingly)

And yet you will not gather a host and strike him?

DAVID

Where's Michal—with the king or Ahinoam?
Of her at least tell me kindlier things.

ABIATHAR

She's well—if any betrayers are.

DAVID

. . . Betrayers?

ABIATHAR

Your *own* name for her.

DAVID

Alas . . . it was!

For so she seemed the day I fled Saul's tent.
Yet if you would indeed undo the oath
I swore—never against the throne to raise
Rebellion up—tell me . . .

ABIATHAR

Scourge her from you!

Put her out of your heart! she is unworthy
Of a dog's fealty!

DAVID

(wornly)

If it be so,

Dawn lilies on the breast of earth are too,
And nesting doves are horrible to Heaven.—
What has she done?

ABIATHAR

Saul has given her
To Phalti, a new lord. She has wed him.

DAVID

No!

ABIATHAR

Yes.

DAVID

No, I say. For last night
Asleep there in the cave, I dreamed of her.
She came repentant.

ABIATHAR

When have women thus
Not waxed and waned, like moons, faithlessly?

DAVID

If I believed it of her, I almost
Would fear the verdant parable of Spring
Would never come again to gladden earth
With rapture; or that Hermon's snowy peak
Against the everlasting sky yonder—

(He breaks off startled, a strange sight meeting his eyes. An eaglet
pierced by an arrow falls at his feet. Concerned he listens for a
cry, but when none comes)

Its wings beat against death unbuoyantly.—
The arrow is not Jonathan's!

ABIATHAR

And why should it be?

Why his?

DAVID

He was here a little since
To warn of Saul's approach! Quick! Quickly!
(Seizing the waterskin)
Into the cave with this—and all sign of us!
A leper came too, a woman crying
For alms.

ABIATHAR

And you let her go unquestioned?

DAVID

Almost I am driven in my need
 To question all now, even Jehovah,
 So great is the desire burning in me
 To rouse all Israel against our wrongs.

(A shout from below hurries them into cave right. More shouts,
 then SAUL and his men enter tumultuously)

SAUL

Find him! He is here! Search and find him—
 And bring him to my sword—and Michal with him!
 For she has fled too. Seize them quickly!

(As the search begins)

When it is done, I'll couch upon their grave
 And hear the worm at them! (To a SOLDIER, from a cave)
 Where is he?

THE SOLDIER

Not there! . . .

SAUL

You have slain him—so you tremble;
 Or seek by some cunning to contrive
 To aid him so that you— (to another SOLDIER opposite)
 Bring me his head!

SECOND SOLDIER

I found no one at all.

SAUL

Lies—and foul ones!
 You fear he will be king instead of me,
 And treasure up reward and amnesty.
 (Running to the caves himself, then out among them)
 Away, ill-fruited ineffectual herd!
 (Scatters them with his sword)
 You've let him flee, through some crevice which
 Is hid. Out and find him—or die for it!
 (To ABNER, who remains with DOEG)
 Not one of them could do it!

ABNER

The king troubles

Too much. He should rest, and let sleep cure
His weariness, while search is made below.

SAUL

Weary am I indeed of these days
Too heavy to be borne! A slave may rest,
A toiler in the fields, but not a king
While still one enemy, upon whose head
A phophet has poured oil, stands free of him!
In the cave yonder it was cool. I'll lie there
Till sunset. Wake me then, if I sleep.
(He enters the cave left. They stand perturbed)

ABNER

(shaking his head)

The Evil Spirit—on him again!

DOEG

As never before.

And Merab is not here, although to her
Alone he listens now.

ABNER

She will follow

And find us, though it's little any can do.
I'll go and look upon him. (Goes, returns)

Already he sleeps,

So we may seek us water . . . Stay, who's yonder?

(MICHAL who has entered starts)

DOEG

Woman, who are you?

MICHAL

(shrinking) A leper—and unclean!

DOEG

What, in these wilds? beyond food and water?

MICHAL

Pity! Unclean!

DOEG

Alone too and hiding?

Had I not once a sister such as thou

I'd gather up these stones to stone you with,

For lies if not contagion. Off! be gone!

(They watch her flee, then go to quench their thirst)

MICHAL

(returning guardedly)

David, if you are here listen quickly!

(At the cave right)

I cannot let you think I too am seeking

Your ruin and discomfiture! . . . David!

(Crossing to cave left)

If you are here, listen to me quickly!

I too am in exile—and hunted.

(Starting at sight of SAUL)

The king, lying there? . . . Oh what has happened?

It cannot be, David, that you have—? Oh!

(A struggle is heard: she quickly flees again. It is DAVID—
withheld by ABIATHAR)

DAVID

(freeing himself)

I tell you it was Michal—and no other!

I heard her voice!

ABIATHAR

This is folly and death

For all of us! Come back!

DAVID

She spoke my name.

And not the breath of God could have swung

The burden from my breast as it did!

ABIATHAR

Stay then and die! I'll not, for any woman!

(He runs toward SAUL'S cave, as DAVID searches. At its mouth
he stops, seeing SAUL. Then he draws and enters)

(A VEILED FIGURE comes from a cleft)

DAVID

(not seeing the FIGURE)

Michal, was it not you—not your cry
I heard, as I crouched there in the darkness?

THE FIGURE

(unveiling)

No, but Merab, to whom David is dearer.
For though I have thrice been rejected by him
I've followed forth here, and dared to steal
Apart thus from Abner and his men
Hoping to find him, longing to, with a love
Like Moloch's flame.

DAVID

Love and you are twain,

As sun and Sheol!

MERAB

Yet I am burnt by it
As sands by desert winds, which I will prove
By first revealing to you that I have come,
Despite your distrust of me, to tell you
The Philistines are quarreling no longer
And drinking night and day in their cities,
But plan now to gather at Gilboa
And break upon us!

DAVID

(startled) That is true?

MERAB

As God is!

And since my father, led by the Evil Spirit,
Refuses now to turn from pursuing you
And gather up the army and give battle,
Another king is needed.

(More boldly)

Another queen too; and who but I
Could stir rebellion up for you and tell
The rulers of our tents that you are sent
By Heaven itself to save us?

DAVID

(staring) . . . O king Saul,
You should have had one son, and no daughters!

MERAB

You scorn me then—again?

DAVID

As I would scorn
Offal brought to the temple to defile it.
More odious is *this* betrayal to me
Than yonder sea of salt and bitter death,
Than foul foam-girt Joppa's idolatries,
Than Pharaoh and the Nile's abhorrencies,
Than death—upon Saul's sword or any other's!

MERAB

Dog! You shall be thrown then as offal
To the dogs by Saul and Doeg, and Adriel,
Whom I will wed. And Michal, who now lies
In the hot arms of another, shall not save you!
(She flings her dagger, but misses him, then is gone)
(ABIATHAR, from SAUL'S cave, reenters)

ABIATHAR

(coming down, excited, with ABISHAI)
The Lord is our God! For He at last
Has set a snare to prove it! Into our hands
The enemy is led!

DAVID

Or we to his!
The woman you saw was Merab.

ABIATHAR

Which is naught!
For Saul, the priest-murderer, is ours!
He lies asleep yonder in the cave,
And but a single sword-thrust will end him.

DAVID

(in spite of himself)

Then, by Jehovah, the thrust shall be mine!

(Draws)

The arrows and bitter wrongs of his rage
 Have pierced me to the marrow, and bled me
 Beyond all further patience. Stand and wait,
 I'll . . . No! I cannot do it. He is the king,
 Who once kindly loved and uplifted me!
 The king divinely chosen!

ABIATHAR

(incitingly)

As were you,

To seize the rotting sceptre from his hands
 And save the people from a boundless blight!
 Take up your sword then, or by the womb
 Of every woman born into the world,
 I'll do it myself!

DAVID

Be it so. God judge me.

(With sword drawn he goes into the cave.

MICHAL reentering sees him)

ABIATHAR

(to ABISHAI, unaware of her)

If Saul cries out, be ready!

MICHAL

(breaking in)

Ah, what now

Do you intend against the king my father
 Lying asleep there, priest of Israel?

(She starts for the cave, but DAVID reappears haggardly.

A piece of SAUL'S cloak is dangling in his hand)

MICHAL

(fiercely to him)

Wretch of God, what have you done? Slain him?
 The king, in his sleep?

DAVID

(unseeingly)

He lay there

With none to prevent it.

MICHAL

Ah! . . .

DAVID

One arm

Was under his head. One blow would have sufficed.

MICHAL

You have not slain him then?

DAVID

Who are you?

The leper who came here in spying rags?

(Recognizing her)

The leper who cried "Pity" and "Unclean!"?

MICHAL

He is not slain?

DAVID

The leper who, like Saul,

Is thirsting for my blood?

MICHAL

No! but only—

DAVID

(all restraint leaving him)

See how I might have slain him, lying there,

(Flaunting the cloak-piece)

This recreant king, who leaves the throne unguarded

To hunt me here with pitiless harrying!

This cruel king, whose dark evil deeds

Have almost stifled God with penitence

For having shaped the world. This . . . O would

That Samuel, or Miriam who trusted you

And prophesied our love, had foretold me

Your beauty was a leper's! Rather then

Would I have died of hunger or of thirst
Upon these sterile rocks, forgetting you,
Or under the wild feet of the Philistines
In battle! . . . ! . . . Would, O would I had your falseness,
Your fierce unfaithfulness, and could have slain him!
 (As he stands half sobbing this out, a dazed shout comes.
 It is SAUL who appears from the cave)

SAUL

Where are you, fools? In my dream it seemed
You left me there alone and unprotected!

DAVID

 (before him)

The king *was* alone—but mightily
Protected, by our God! Woe to him though
If now he does not gather up the host
And lead Israel forth into battle!
 (Flinging the cloak-piece down, he turns and goes,
 his comrades with him)
 (SAUL stares, then strides down to
 MICHAL and seizes her)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: The house of MIRIAM, the "Witch of Endor," by Mount Gilboa—where SAUL is encamped against the Philistines. It is of one story and built rectangularly about an inner court, which is dimly lighted. Under the housetop which partly juts out over the court are doors leading to the rooms of the house, and before one of these is a lattice. On the left a door opens to the street. At the back is a teraphim, or image of divination. On the right a stairway mounts to the roof.

It is night, near dawn, and there is vague lightning and a low moan of wind. Forward on a stone seat sits MIRIAM in blind restlessness. During the Act comes dawn.

MIRIAM

Adah! . . . The child is sunken in a sleep.
Yet would I have her near me in this night
And hear again the boding of her tale.

(Staring trancedly)

Unto the blind the vision and the awe
Of the invisible ever sway in,
The shadow of nativities that lead
Upon fatalities.

Girl! Adah! Girl!

(Rubbing her eyes, ADAH enters from a chamber)

ADAH

I slumbered.

MIRIAM

Sleep and the young are ever friends.

But stand where I again may feel your words
And fathom them . . . You fled your mistress Merab
In fear of her?

ADAH

All the palace feared her.

MIRIAM

And Saul, after he seized upon Michal,
Let Merab cruelly prison her?

ADAH

I saw it.

MIRIAM

(after a pause)

And it was in the tent of Merab you heard
That Saul, despairing of tomorrow's battle,
Will come tonight and bid me raise the spirit
Of Samuel from the dead and learn the issue?

ADAH

Doeg said it; and also said his spies
Had warned him that the whole army murmured
For David to be king, if Saul's defeated.

(A knock at the gate. They start. The wind moans)

MIRIAM

(rising)

Who seeks blind Miriam of Endor's roof
Under the night and trouble of the storm?
Who comes to me?

DAVID

A friend!

MIRIAM

(joyfully)

As knows my soul!

(Hastens to the door. DAVID enters—
with ABIATHAR and ABISHAI)

Thy voice again, anointed son of Jesse!
Is it indeed thou?

DAVID

My father's son.

MIRIAM

Let me behold thee with my fingers' touch
And gather in them sight of thee again.

(Her hands go over him)

Yea, it is thou! and like sweet dulcimers
In Spring thy voice wakes chords of memory.

(Stopping suddenly)

But aie! Why are you here? . . . You have been *there*?

DAVID

In Saul's camp? Since dawn I have.

MIRIAM

Inviting death?

Do you not know—?

DAVID

Too well I do, that Saul

Would rather trample me than a host of foes,
And that he falsely believes, in his wrath,
I mean to join the Philistines against him.
But where is Michal . . . ?

It is of her I've come, . . . to learn of you
 Who see and know, though blind, what none else can.
 She was not in the camp.

MIRIAM

Mad! You are mad—

As all men are, when women are the reason!
 This is an ill hour to venture here.
 Be gone, then, at once!

DAVID

She's in some peril.

MIRIAM

And you in more! For Saul, doubting the battle,
 Intends to seek this house before he sleeps
 And bid me call up Samuel!

DAVID

From the dead?

MIRIAM

I say be gone! I know nothing of Michal.

(A knock at the gate)

Already the king, perhaps! Or if not he,
 Some other whom he sends . . . You must hide
 Behind the lattice yonder, till I answer.

(They quickly obey. A louder knock. Then:)

SAUL

Woman of Endor! Woman of Endor! Open!
 Rise up from your sleep and open to us.

MIRIAM

Who crieth at my gate?

SAUL

Open, I say!

MIRIAM

To danger and night thieves?

SAUL

To worse, if you

Delay!

MIRIAM

Enter then—and tell your purpose.

(Admits him, with ISHUI and ADRIEL)

SAUL

I'm here, witch and prophetess of Endor,
That you may call up from the Pit for me
The fate-revealing dead.

MIRIAM

(starting back)

What is this?

You come with snaring; knowing well the king
Forbids all incantation!

SAUL

You can raise for me,

Out of the awful dark the dead dwell in,
One I would question.

MIRIAM

Nay! . . .

SAUL

Prepare then

Before your teraphim! Bid Samuel
Appear—no harm shall come to you, I swear—
Prepare and tell the battle!

MIRIAM

(with a cry)

I know thee now!

(Falling prostrate)

Thou'rt Saul, the mighty king! lord of terror!

SAUL

The battle soon begins. He must answer.
Forsaken of all other signs and dreams
Am I, and of oracles to augur it!
And only he—

MIRIAM

I will not! I dare not!

SAUL

His spirit shall forgive—I will ask it—
And comfort me against despair's torrent
That overwhelms me!

MIRIAM

If I must, stand by.

(Goes to the teraphim and kneels.

Then, with arms up)

Prophet of Israel, who art beyond
The troubling and the terrifying grave,
Beyond the moan and dark melancholy
Of ways that lead to Sheol, rise! Arise!

(A wind passes)

Prophet of prophets, Samuel, return!
Not in the name of Baal, Ammon, Ashtoreth,
Dagon or all deities that dwell
In trembling temples of idolatry,
But of Jehovah! of Jehovah! Rise!

(Elemental cries, then forms, stream out of the earth.

Among them the figure of SAMUEL takes shape awesomely)

SAUL

(covering his eyes)

Woman, I can not, dare not, look upon them!
Reveal the sight!

MIRIAM

I see spirits ascending,

Forms as of gods in dreadful apparition,
Dim shapes and beings from the under-night.
And now is one within a mantle clad
Who looketh—

SAUL

Samuel!

MIRIAM

As if he held

Omniscience in his heart. And about him
Breathes the cold anguish of eternity.
His eyes impale me!

SAUL

Spirit, give me word!

(Drops to his knees convulsively)

SAMUEL

Oh evil king, and wretched king, why hast
Thou brought me from the quietness and rest?

SAUL

(hoarsely)

The battle!

SAMUEL

Evil thou art! And were the power
Given into thy hands, wouldst be more so.
For underneath this night thou hast conspired
To slay thy daughter Michal, if at dawn
The battle shall be lost.

DAVID

(low)

Oh! . . .

ISHUI

(startled)

Who cried there?

SAMUEL

To slay her . . . lest she fall to David's hands!
(More aweingly)
Therefore I tell thee, proud and peaceless king,
Thy crown and thy sceptre shrivel fast.
The battle shall be lost—it shall be lost!
(Slowly disappears)

ADRIEL

(loathingly to ISHUI)

Did you conceive this horror?

ISHUI

Peace, Meholan!

Now is no time for fools and questioning.

(To SAUL)

We must return, father, to our tents
And make ready.

SAUL

(starting up) The battle shall begin!
 Go out at once to Jonathan—and say it.
 No prophecy shall sink me and no shade!
 (He follows ISHUI out)
 (Then DAVID comes from the lattice deeply moved)

DAVID

Michal to die? . . . and Israel to fall?
 Prophet of God, Samuel, come back
 And disavow it! Out of your sleep return
 Compassionate against this destiny
 To Israel—and me!

ADRIEL

(staring amazed) David, you?
 Are you here?

DAVID

Not your eyes only, Adriel,
 Are staring forth that question, but your conscience.
 Cry out then, if you will, and betray me,
 For Saul is still near.

ADRIEL

Knowing the truth,
 I'd rather betray ten kings of Israel
 Than Michal to death now!

DAVID

Then reveal
 More of her; where she is, and how?

ADRIEL

Doeg alone knows, he was bidden
 By Saul last night to guard her with his life.

DAVID

Then find Doeg and draw him here at once.

ADRIEL

I'll do it!

DAVID

Lure him to us by any means,
That we may learn the place of her prison.

(ADRIEL goes)

DAVID

(more peacelessly)

The quivering quicksands of destiny
Must now be stayed under us, or heaven
Will seem but a relentless shield to keep
God from our prayers.

MIRIAM

(inspiredly) God cannot be kept,
Nor mocked! The wicked flourish—but not long!

DAVID

(as cries break, afar)

The battle has begun—ere Saul was ready
And willed it! (Listening) Would I too might ride there
And fight against the foe! . . . Abiathar,
Watch well from without and learn for us
All that befalls. (To ADAH) Close the gate after him.

ADAH

(at the gate, as he goes)

My mistress Merab! I saw her there plainly!
The lightning on her face fixed it palely.
O do not let her enter . . . O do not.
I fear her.

DAVID

(grimly) If her wiles have indeed
Harmed Michal, none henceforth ever shall fear her.
(He cloaks his face. The gate is thrown open)

MERAB

(entering)

Woman of Endor, I seek Adriel,
My husband . . . He came here with the king.
(Stops, sensing danger)

DAVID

But did not go with him, no, or to him,
Most savage and unnatural of sisters!

MERAB

(as he unmasks)
Shepherd! . . .

DAVID

One with a wolf's fangs tonight,
If Michal has been harmed.

MERAB

How? Who says it?

DAVID

Saul intends, if beaten in the battle,
That she is not to live.

MERAB

And am I Saul?

MIRIAM

(suddenly crying out)
The destiny of Israel begins!
(She has fallen into a trance and speaks from it)
Upon the mountain side and in the valley
The king and Jonathan have joined the chariots,
And all the Philistines are charging at them.

DAVID

(as shouting arises)
Almighty, save Thy people and Thy temple!
Let not Thy altars fall on Mount Zion!

ADRIEL

(arriving without)
Open the gate! Open to us! quickly!

DAVID

(gladly)
Adriel—with Doeg! He has found him!
(Opens the gate himself, but again masked)

DOEG

(entering first)

Witch of Endor, why am I bidden here
 Where Saul already . . . ? Merab, you? Is this
 Some perfidy? (Draws) That cloaked knave yonder—
 Who is he?

DAVID

One who will answer Doeg well.

(Uncloaks)

DOEG

I'm tricked then, and cheated? . . .
 Fallen into a den of treachery?

DAVID

And not contriving one, as is your wont?
 Where's Michal?

DOEG

In this witch's house, or any,
 I answer only to Saul.

DAVID

And I to none,

For spilling evil blood,—if from her head
 You've torn one little lock.

DOEG

(derisively)

That is your fear?

For Michal? only Michal? only Michal?
 Be eased then, Bethlehemite. Her little locks
 Fall softly still about her face, softly—
 But in the embrace of earth . . . She is dead!
 And no prophet-anointed harp-player
 Can resurrect her.

DAVID

(palely)

. . . Were that so indeed . . .

And you the cause—or half the cause of it—

DOEG

I tell you—

DAVID

Were it so, and you dared now
 To say so, this lightning breaking over us,
 Like wrath in God's veins,
 Would shrivel you to ashes with its flame.
 (Drawing his sword slowly)
 Once more I ask, where is she?

MIRIAM

David, stay!

Again the gift of trance is upon me!
 (Staring strainedly)
 I see her! My eyes pierce the blindness!
 She's in a cave near, bound and alone,
 And weeping; and her lips move in prayer.
 I'll go to her and fetch her.

DOEG

(lunging)

Take this then!

DAVID

(warding the blow)
 Cowardly and ungodly corrupter
 Of all about you! (Attacking) Spreader of such treasons
 As make the very stars in their courses
 Seem tares sown hostile over the fields of heaven—
 (Pressing him)
 Israel shall be free of you at last!
 (Forced to the lattice, DOEG tries to escape. But
 ABIATHAR'S sword flashes and runs him through)

DAVID

(as death rattles in his throat)
 That was ill done, Abiathar! I meant
 To lead him into the Judgment Hall for sentence.
 But since it's done, bear him out fittingly.
 (DOEG is borne off, with ABISHAI'S aid)
 (Wails and running feet then begin to be heard)

ABISHAI

(returning with ABIATHAR)

Some battle woe already has begun;
Some woe for us!

DAVID

Go gather news of it.

THE WAILERS

(nearer, as ABISHAI obeys)

The battle's lost! Woe! The battle's lost!
And Saul has fled! Saul, the king! Fled!

DAVID

It cannot be, so soon! But if it is,
I must go forth and strive instantly
To bend defeat back.

ABIATHAR

(scoffingly)

With but one sword?

DAVID

Naught's lost till all is lost.

ABIATHAR

And all is.

DAVID

If I appear the army may take heart—

ABIATHAR

And follow you to further desolation?

(Vehemently)

You are the Lord's anointed; and as never
Before will be needed for retrieval
Of what is lost. (The gate opens) And see,
an omen to you!

(MICHAL enters with MIRIAM)

A new salvation may begin for us,
For she is Saul's daughter, pledged to you.

MIRIAM

(toward DAVID)

I found her, as I said, within the cave.
The vision did not fail. I went to her
And loosed the cruel cords. Hungrily
They bit into her arms.

MICHAL

Oh, can it be—

(Falls sobbing at DAVID'S feet)

That once again I'm free and among friends?

DAVID

(repressing a desire to lift her)

Leave us, all of you . . . Abishai,
Learn if the king indeed has fled; and too,
Of Jonathan. Abiathar, take Merab
Into the house for further questioning.

(Then, alone with MICHAL)

Upon the mountain Israel is falling,
Because of Saul's anger and neglect,
And Michal's distrust of me.

MICHAL

True, too true!

Therefore I ask nothing of you, my lord,
Nothing now, save to be heard . . . and then
Forgiveness.

DAVID

Which again you would abuse,
As hitherto you have unheedingly?

MICHAL

I'm but a woman; and the entanglements
Of duty amid love we have no skill
To loosen—

DAVID

Save by ruthlessly breaking them?
And peace with them, thread by precious threads?

MICHAL

All unbelievable it seemed that you
Could wait on time to tide you to the kingdom.

DAVID

Therefore in spying rags you followed me
Even into Engedi's wilderness
To finish my destruction?

MICHAL

Nay! but only
To find you—and with you forgiveness:
Then save, or die with you!

DAVID

Phalti, then?

MICHAL

I did not wed him! With my own hand
On any altar rather would I have died
Than do it!

DAVID

Against belief can I believe it?
And truly trust it?

MICHAL

Let your heart answer!

DAVID

(lifting her up)
A little since a tithing of the love
You thus avow would have seemed bliss enough
To feed my heart forever—

MICHAL

Now all's yours!
For henceforth in your arms, upon your breast,
I'll cling close and trust you, till our ways
Shall lead down to the valley of death; and there—
(A greater wailing without startles and parts them.
As they listen, ABISHAI enters, awed and trembling)

DAVID

Abishai! . . . what news now? what evil news?

ABISHAI

Saul is slain! . . .

DAVID

Saul? . . .

ABISHAI

(choking)

And Jonathan!

The chariot that bore them into the battle
Was flooded and swept down, under its tide.

DAVID

(strickenly)

Jonathan too?

ABISHAI

Striving to save the king!

MICHAL

(in tears)

Both of them? . . . Ah no!

DAVID

If it be so,

Can anything, even a miracle,
Bring simple peace again to my heart?

(Moved immeasurably)

O Israel, the Infinite has touched
Your glory and it changes to a shroud—
For Saul is lying low upon the mountain
And Jonathan, the beautiful, beside him,
Broken and beaten down by battle-death!
Brave Jonathan, for whom so willingly
I'd give the flow of life in my veins
And be utter, utter drouth—and die!

(Then swept by bitterness)

Yea, peaks of Gilboa, gladly would I!
So let clouds cover you and ashes be
Your soil, till I bring upon Philistia

And Gath and Askalon extinguishing
And Sorrow—and a sea of burning tears!

(Turning then to MICHAL)

But we must hush the anguish of our grief,
Beloved, though as yet we cannot see
How even love, sweeter than trickling balm,
Can heal us in the unbegotten years.
Come, then, to the housetop. Let us watch
The wings of dawn, that ever spread new hope
Over the world, even amid death.

(Slowly they mount the stair, his arm about her)

THE END

THE MAD PHILOSOPHER

They let him wander as he will
By wood and river, vale and hill,
Though snapped by madness are the strings
Of his wan mind's imaginings.

And often his sad spirit's breath
Will chant of life and love and death,
Twanging upon the broken ends
Of strings that some chance moment mends.

'The harlot moon still clings to earth,'
He croons, 'though love's of little worth.
Cold as the spirit of a star
Her lips and eyes and bosom are. . . .

'Within some sky beyond the sky
There is a whisper, Why, Why, Why?
If I could climb the wind to it,
Of frenzied earth should soon be quit. . . .

'A person lives that men call God.
I caught Him once within a clod.
He is not really God at all,
But only atoms that can crawl. . . .

'Hey diddle, many sorrows be
Within the womb of destiny.
That's why the thrush will chant all day—
To keep from hearing men who pray. . . .

'The sweet, sweet herb of happiness
Grows ever less, and less, and less.
I'm sure it is because men look
At their own image in the brook. . . .

'A bride is such a lily thing;
She lets you bind her with a ring.
I see Queen Gwin and Lancelot—
But Arthur's face is all a blot. . . .

'Lean down and I will tell you why
The stars are lighted in the sky.
They are for tapers on the bier
Of—hush! don't say it: He is near. . . .

'The owl is hooting what o'clock
The Judgment Day at last shall knock.
But time who whips us to the grave
Is the one saviour who can save. . . .

'I'll vow it, though to Hell I'm sunk:
God with the whole world's tears is drunk.
That's why He is not God at all
But only atoms that can crawl. . . .

'Aye, doubt! But when the lightning's knout
Splits the sky's skull do Brains fall out?
There's sun and moon and sky and sea
And worm and ape—and you and me. . . .

'Yet if you love a maid then all
The atoms do not seem to crawl
So heartlessly: though why it is
Can be no business of His.' . . .

So sings he in the little whiles
That health again half on him smiles,
Twanging the sadly broken strings
Of his poor mind's imaginings.

'VIS ULTIMA'

There is no day but leads me to
A peak impossible to scale,
A task at which my hands must fail,
A sea I cannot swim or sail.
There is no night I suffer through
But Destiny rules stern and pale:
And yet what I am meant to do
I will do, ere Death drops his veil.

And it shall be no little thing,
Though to oblivion it fall,
For I shall strive to it through all
That can imperil or appal.
So at each morning's trumpet-ring
I mount again, less slave and thrall,
And at the barriers gladly fling
A fortitude that scorns to crawl.

PROGRESS

Is it a wave we catch at,
To find that it ebbs only to leave
A little foam in the hand,
A little faith, a little dream,
Luring us on to tomorrow?
Or is it a tide that must be taken
To voyage the Universe?

THE GREATER PATIENCE

The passionless and imperceptible drifting
Of clouds that come where no wind seems to be,

That rise as if some need of earth were lifting
Them on, to bring her fields fertility,
Is like this moving through the soul of me
Of thoughts that seem of some magnetic need
At the heart of life to come, and drop their dew
And bring the fruitful words that men call true.

What is it you would tell me, O great skies?
That imperceptible is God's intent?
Coming as if its quest were never meant,
Yet bringing forth such fruit as never dies?
And do you therefore vow the impatient weave
But doubt; the patient only can believe?

A NEW COMET

Maverick of the skies, charging with fiery tail
From pasture to cold pasture of interstellar space;
Branded with an earth name, not with the mark
Of the Great Rancher who herds universes;
Lassoed by our gaze, for a brief while,
Then plunging far from sight again to return
After a cycle of straying, you remind us
There is a dark beginning, a dark ending,
For everything; a little light between
To live and laugh and dream and hope and love by.

PROVIDENCE

When I was far from the sea's voice and vastness
I looked for God in the days and hours and seasons;
But now, by its large and eternal tides surrounded,
I know I shall find Him only in the greater swing
of the years.

For like the sea's are His mysteries, not to be
learned from a single surf-beat;
No wave suffices Him for a revelation.

Like the sea's, that dower all lands with dews that
 bring forth blossoms,
 Yet have no memory of its far salt surges.

I will be patient then, sure that stars are not
 merely jetsam
 Tossing on waters of waste Omnipotence;
 Sure that the tidal swing of the centuries
 Is not without a meaning for mankind.

TO A BOASTER

The sea shall not cover you,
 The mountains shall not be your tomb.
 You shall lie in a small place
 Quietly.
 For earth has so many to quarter
 In her acres
 That none shall have more room
 For his last rest
 Than enough to forget in—
 And be forgotten.

WITH OMAR

I sat with Omar by the Tavern door,
 Musing rebelliously upon his Lore;
 And soon with answers alternate we strove
 Whether beyond Death Life has any shore.

*"Come, fill the Cup," said he. "In the fire of Spring
 Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling.*

*The Bird of Time has but a little way
 To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing."*

"The Bird of Time?" I answered. "Then shall I,
 Heavy with Wine, not fail to cross the Sky

Unto Eternity upon his wings—
And failing fall into the Gulf and die?"

*"So for the Glories of this World sigh some
And some for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
But you, Friend, take the Cash—the Credit leave,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!"*

"But idly at the garish noisy Show
Spend all upon the Wine, the while I know
A possible Tomorrow may bring Thirst
For Drink but Credit then shall cause to flow?"

*"Yea, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust unto Dust, and under dust to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans End."*

"Into the Dust we shall descend—we must.
But may the Soul not leave the crumbling Crust
In which it is engaged? To hope or to
Despair it will—which is more wise or just?"

*"The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes—or it prospers; and anon
Like snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone."*

"Like snow it comes, to cool one burning day;
And like it goes—for all our plea or sway.
But Wine, not bitter Tears, can ever purge
The vision it has brought to us away."

*"But to this world we come and Why not knowing
Nor Whence, like water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the waste,
We know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing."*

"True, little do we know of Why or Whence,
But is, forsooth, our Darkness evidence
There is no Light? The worm may see no star
Though Heaven with myriad multitudes be dense."

*"But, all unasked, we're hither hurried whence?
And, all unasked, we're Whither hurried hence?
O, many a cup of this forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence."*

Forbidden it is not. Or if Forbid
'Tis only by the Soul within us hid
That cries, 'Feed, feed me not on Wine alone,
For to Sublimar Banquets I am bid.'"

*"Well oft I think that never blows so red
The rose as where some buried Caesar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in her lap from some once lovely Head."*

"If from the shapely Clay through with Life's throes
More beautiful spring, Hyacinth and Rose,
May the Great Gardener for the uprooted soul
Not find use sweeter than—useless Repose?"

*"We do not know—so fill the cup that clears
Today of past regret and future fears:
Tomorrow!—Why, Tomorrow we may be
Ourselves with yesterday's seven thousand years."*

"There is no Cup to bring oblivion
More during than Regret and Fear—no, none!
And Wine that's Wine today may often be
Marah before tomorrow's Sands have run."

*"Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint and heard great argument
About it and about; but ever more
Came out by the same door wherein I went."*

"The doors of Argument may lead nowhither,
Reason become a prison where may wither
From sunless eyes the Infinite, from hearts
All hope—when their sojourn too long is thither."

*"Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the throne of Saturn sate,
And many a Knot unravelled by the Road—
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate."*

"The Master-knot knows but the Master-hand,
That weaves or tangles many a Saturn-band
On the wide air. No sure unravelling,
This side of death, seems meant for us or planned."

*"Yet if the Soul can fling the Dust aside
And naked on the air of heaven ride,
Wer't not a shame—wer't not a shame for it
In this clay carcass crippled to abide?"*

"No, for a day bound in our Dust may teach
More of the Saki's mind than we could reach
Through aeons under any *earthless* Sky—
May open through all Mystery a breach."

*"You speak as if Existence closing your
Account, and mine, should know the like no more;
The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has poured
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour."*

"He will—and prick them with the point of Death.
But in each Bubble dwells there not His Breath
That seems seeking to lift it toward the Sphere
Where lofty and alone He wandereth?"

*"A Moment's Halt—a momentary taste
Of Being from the Well amid the Waste—
And Lo!—the phantom Caravan has reached
The Nothing it set out from—Oh, make haste!"*

"To quaff *one* cup? though well aware that we
Shall crave three million others—then thrice three?"

If the Well has a Master, will He say
'Taste'—then deprive us of it utterly?"

*"But see his Presence through Creation's Veins,
Running quicksilver-like eludes your pains;
Taking all shapes from Mah to Mahi; and
They change and perish all—but He remains."*

"Not surely! For, lie down to sleep and lo
The soul seems quenched in darkness—is it so?
Shall we not rather trust what seemeth *not*
Of Death, until we know—until we know?"

*"So wastes the hour—gone in the vain pursuit
Of This and That we strive o'er and dispute.
Better be jocund with the fruitful Grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, fruit."*

"Aye; but how often is a Shadow thrown
Across our Cup—the Shadow of the Unknown,
So filling it with Night we cannot drink
Or bide content with dim-lit earth alone."

*"Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close!
The Nightingale that on the branches sang—
Ah whence, and whither flown again, who knows?"*

"So does it seem—no other joy like these!
Yet Summer comes, and Autumn's honored ease,
And Wintry Age oft feels the prescient sap
Of a New Spring, whose verdure shall not cease."

*"Then well He who with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Will He with stern Predestined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my fall to sin?"*

"He will not. If one evil we endure
 To ultimate Debasing, oh be sure
 'Tis not of Him predestined, and the sin
 Not His nor ours—but Fate's He could not cure."

So till the wan and early scent of day
 I strove, then silent turned at last away,
 Thinking how men in ages yet unborn
 Would ask and answer—trust and doubt and pray.

ARDUIN

CHARACTERS

ARDUIN (of Provence)	.....	An Alchemist
ION	.....	His Nephew
RHASIS	.....	An Arab, his attendant and assistant
MYRRHA	.....	A Greek Girl

TIME: The Fifteenth Century.

PLACE: Egypt.

ARDUIN

SCENE: The laboratory of ARDUIN in a house in the Nill opposite Cairo. It is a large room on the walls of which mystic figures of the Hermetic Philosophy are drawn, together with the zodiac and other astronomical signs; and many objects, animals and mineral, are to be seen about the room, among them a large open sarcophagus in the rear centre. On either side broad window openings reveal the Egyptian night, and one frames the moonlit Sphinx and Pyramids. A table with alembics, retorts, etc., is set toward the right front. Right and left are doors; and to the left and back is an alcove before which curtains hang. Lamps burn.

RHASIS, who is busy at the table in a troubled manner, lifts a retort and is gazing at it when ION enters determinedly with MYRRHA.

ION

Rhasis! . . .

RHASIS

Young master Ion, what is this?

(Drops the retort)

Why have you left the city and come here?

Do you not know what hour you have chosen?

ION

That of his mad dream for the resurrection
Of his dead wife who so long has lain there.

Yet I have come. For the calamity
That will await his reasonless belief
Must be averted.

RHASIS

And . . . have you considered

What may befall to you, who disavowed
His art and deserted him,
If he tonight should fail and find you here?

ION

He would believe I have returned only
To thwart his alchemy,
And that I have forgot whatever wrong,
Unexpiated still, my father did him.

RHASIS

A wrong he never forgets!

ION

Nor ever will,

Unless, when he fails to raise her up
From death there, I can at once allay
His frenzied disappointment.

RHASIS

By what means?

ION

(hesitantly)

A face . . .

RHASIS

(staring) Other than hers which till today,
Shrouded under the lid of that dark granite,
Has been the one? . . . With whose face then?

ION

Myrrha's!

(Turning to her)
Which can alone of all earthly sights,
If what you say of his dead wife be true.
For if Myrrha indeed is so much like her,
Might she not, appearing suddenly,
When death still defies him—

RHASIS

(refusingly) This is folly,
One madder than his dream! I'll not chance it;
For do you suppose—

ION

A weak yielding to fear
Will be the folly now, if no face,
Not even one resembling her appears,
When the elixir fails.

RHASIS

I will not chance it!
By Allah, no; nor sanction it with silence.
The young are ever prone to urgent wants,
Unwise as this would be. Go from here then,
And take Myrrah with you. For he now
Is on the house top saying for the last time
The seven incantations against death
To the seven planets in their circling spheres;
And when he comes down—

ION

(bitterly) He must see her!
I'm weary of the city and its poverty;
Sick of regret too at having deserted him.
And surely the face of one—

MYRRHA

(shrinking) Ion, no! . . .
I fear this place. Let us go from it.
The strangeness and that still sarcophagus
Appal me.

ION

And make you forget our love?
The long bridal hope of it deferred?

RHASIS

Young master, she does not. But with prudence
Foresees that the scales of destiny
Are weighted against a hope so uncertain.
Better than you I know it is not wise.
For ten years I have dwelt here with my master,
Ten passings of the pilgrims off to Mecca,
While he has sought this death-quelling elixir.
And now he believes that she, his wife, too
Is waiting on its miracle to rise.

ION

(impatiently)
But since the dead are dead and cannot rise—!

MYRRHA

Take me away, please, Ion; at once.
The dread I feel here is more than dread.
My father in the city will receive us
Again. Let us return—

ION

And leave him here,
Old, alone and stunned, to stare at last
Upon her withered unawaking face?
Myrrha, I cannot. He was kind to me
As none have been. And now to let cowardice,
Which ever has a premonition ready,
Prevent me—

RHASIS

(staring) Go, young master! He is descending.
Go now. His chant has ceased.

ION

I will stay,

And Myrrha with me. There is no other hope
Or buoy for him against the surge of despair
That will flood over him when his dream breaks.

RHASIS

(shaking his head)

One warning word more then. He has toiled
So long amid inscrutable mysteries
To bring this resurrection that I fear
His mind, overstrained—

MYRRHA

(paling)

Ah no, not that!

RHASIS

I do not say it is so, but only—

ION

(angrily)

That now, having implanted fear in her,
You seek to water it with wild falsity?—
Dismiss your dread, Myrrha. Go to the curtains
And stand behind them till his incantations
And the elixir fail: then appear.

For when he sees your face so like the one
He for so many years has . . . Come. At once.

(Leads her behind the curtains, then hurries out)

(ARDUIN enters, exalted by his great hope. He comes down to
the table, holding an alembic. A pause then he speaks transportedly:)

ARDUIN

At last the night has come when I shall clasp her
And banish death to biers beyond the stars!

RHASIS

(kneeling)

Master . . . !

ARDUIN

Rise up, and never kneel again:
 For from henceforth I shall be lord of life,
 The secret of the phoenix in my hand,
 And you shall hold authority beside me,
 You, my unfailing ministrant and friend.

(Lifting the alembic)

I have grown old and gray in this quest,
 Youthless and as a leper to delight,
 But triumph now is trembling in my clasp.

RHASIS

And I rejoice, master; for I have toiled
 Beside you through the years. But is it sure?

ARDUIN

As sun and moon and stars! As the sky is!
 For last night in a dream deeper than death
 I suddenly beheld how it must be.
 I saw a tomb far-hidden in the earth
 And life above it mixing salt and sulphur,
 Twin elements of the great trinity
 From which all things are born. And as I looked
 I saw her pouring out quick mercury
 Upon a bat's wing wrought with hieroglyphics
 Of gold and silver, which in an eye's twinkle
 Were melted with strange voice and sudden flame—
 The while she gazed upon me meaningly.
 And then, when all was done, my wife, my Rhea,
 Bathed in the loveliness of resurrection,
 Rose from the clearing fumes, fair, young and glad!

RHASIS

But, master, are dreams true?

ARDUIN

(loftily) Such dreams as these?

RHASIS

Pardon! I only know that you have said
 Some come from Ophiuchus, the dread demon

You've warned me of, the one who so often
 Has struck the secret strangely from your hand.
 Many have followed a mirage of dreams
 And found but thirsty sand. Trust not too much!

ARDUIN

But now, at the very edge of the oasis
 I've strained toward so long, shrink and falter?
 Like Ion, the son of Ion who so wronged me,
 And whom I yet shall—?

RHASIS

Master, no; not so.

But I would spare you pain that may prove
 Unbearable.

ARDUIN

By doubting me? and doubting
 What other seers before me have proven?
 Did not great Hermes say of the elixir
 It should be found? And did not Polydorus
 The Greek, chancing upon it, raise the dead
 Slain in battle? And did not Christ, the Jew,
 Who with a word changed water into wine,
 Undo death, and aweingly astound
 The centuries with Lazarus?

RHASIS

Yes, master.

And you are wiser, I know, than all men
 From Mecca to the mouth of the great Sea,
 Though you have set a woman in your heart.
 But should the elixir fail—

ARDUIN

Only the weak
 Let the hyenas fear and failure stalk them.
 For me all things have pointed presciently
 To victory. First a voice breathed it,
 The very day she died, into my brain:
 It said she should arise! Then a great book
 Of wisdom, in a strange tongue of the East,

Opened within my hands at these words:
In ten years the miracle shall come,
Revealed to you within the land of the Sphinx.

RHASIS

But many say the Sphinx—

ARDUIN

It has awaited

For centuries under those desert stars
 To see the miracle I shall reveal.

RHASIS

That may be so, master, but your wife—

ARDUIN

Awaits too, within that trysting granite,
 To rise up and cast off the cerements
 That have so long bound her, and to refute
 My brother Ion who, I now can tell you,
 Fiercely desired her, but when sent away
 Revenged himself upon her by avowing
 That she had wantoned with him.

MYRRHA

(involuntarily)

Oh, sir . . . no!

ARDUIN

(startled, trembling)

Who spoke? Who spoke there? . . . Was it you,
 My Rhea, my beloved? (Running to sarcophagus)
 Was it you?

RHASIS

(quickly)

No, master! It was only—

ARDUIN

(gazing in) Fail to bring
 Her beauty which lies here back to life?

Her face which can alone sow the desert
 Of my despair with a new verdure of dreams
 And fill the ways of the world again with hope?

(Leaving the sarcophagus)

I say she is immortal and shall rise!
 The moment for it now is at hand.
 The moon is full; Venus is in the house
 Of Ready Taurus; and today from out
 The fumes of this alembic, which was once
 A gift of Cleopatra . . . But, prepare!
 Life will return to her—and youth to me.

RHASIS

(obeying)

I will do all you say, master, but if—

ARDUIN

No death-word more of doubt! It is the power
 That ever holds us from our destiny.
 Here's gold, to be mingled with the sulphur
 That has begun to live within this vial.
 I must again behold her as she was
 When first we pluckt the poppies of Provence,
 And hear again her lips, so long still,
 Shape sounds sweeter than Memnon's harp at dawn.

(Entrancedly)

She shall arise and say, "The long years
 Have paled your brow, my Arduin, and touched
 To gray the living lustre of your hair,
 But not Antinous could seem to me
 So fair or so wonderful,
 For you have brought me back from the numb realm
 Of nothingness to life." Wait no longer!

(Invoking the alembic, as RHASIS proceeds)

I charge you, vial of immortality,
 By the quick circling planets in their spheres,
 And by the searchless sources of the Nile,
 And by the elements earth, air and fire,
 That hold within their intermingled veins

The power to end death—I charge you now
Bring forth the elixir that will make her rise.

(Pours the ingredients: fumes arise then clear. He turns with the glass to the tomb, but stops enspelled—for MYRRHA, in fear and wonder, has parted the curtains)

ARDUIN

(gazing at her—as RHASIS hurries off)

Out of the tomb already you have risen,
My Rhea, ere this vial was poured upon you?

(As she shrinks)

Do not start back in trembling and dread,
Oh do not, for I am Arduin
Who once . . . But I see that all is strange
To you, here, as yet, and that the chill
And memory of the tomb still are on you,
Holding you in a mist . . . That is because
This strange land you gaze upon is Egypt,
Whither in grief I brought you, my dead bride.
Yet if you do not know me, soon you shall.
For youth already is surging back to me,
As life will to you, from far Provence!
Already passion lifts away the years
And I—

MYRRHA

Oh, sir—!

ARDUIN

Still you shrink, bewildered?

I'm Arduin indeed, who with long years
Of striving have brought you back to life
And breath and new hope and blossoming.
Come to my arms then, oh come quickly
As you of old did, and our warm youth
Shall once again—

MYRRHA

But, sir, I'm not the one
Whom you . . . Sir, I am only—

ARDUIN

(more ardently) Why do you say
That "sir" to me coldly, not my name?
(Dropping the alembic to clasp her)
Surely you now remember, in my arms,
The brimming wondrous beauty of our youth?
Surely kisses can burn the years away?

MYRRHA

(in terror)
No, no! . . . loose me! . . .

ARDUIN

I tell you I'm Arduin,
The lover who was once so dear to you
That every word I spoke seemed, you said,
Fragrant of Paradise! . . . What then appals you?

MYRRHA

You are mistaken, sir; I'm not your wife!

ARDUIN

Not she? Not my Rhea, the sweet flower
Whose withering so blighted earth for me?
You are; and have deceived me;
In death, there, you have forgotten me!
(Disorderedly)
Has the tomb treachery to change the soul?
Must I believe it, now, at this moment
When I have brought you back to life and light?

MYRRHA

Sir, no! Hear me: I have—

ARDUIN

If you cannot
Or will not shake oblivion from off you
And let memory of me wake again,
It is because, in that other world,
That tomb-world I've brought you from, there is
Some other whom you—

MYRRHA

Oh, sir, no!

ARDUIN

Some other

You want—now that I have freed you from
 This granite shroud . . . Or is it that, returned,
 You gaze aghast upon my face grown old
 With ceaseless strife to conquer death for you,
 Old and furrowed but for your delight?—
 I'll not believe that any tomb in the world
 Should spawn such ingratitude!

MYRRHA

None has, sir!

ARDUIN

Then since I am indeed not distempered,
 As in the mirror of your fear I seemed,
 I'll hold the image I have given breath.
 (Again clasps her)

MYRRHA

But hear me, sir. I'm not the one you loved,
 Who for so long . . . Oh, sir, I am only,
 I love only—

ARDUIN

(starkly) Who? . . . And where is he?

MYRRHA

I love Ion—

ARDUIN

My brother Ion?

MYRRHA

No, sir!

ARDUIN

(frenziedly)

My brother who, before he died, swore
 You were indeed his mistress?

MYRRHA

Sir, I pray you—!

ARDUIN

(with clenched uplifted hands)

You stars, from whom I've wrenched a false victory,
 You are not stars indeed but only vermin
 Crawling over the sky to confound me.
 And you, God, who have permitted this,
 Have made of your Heaven but a brothel
 Where they have met, these lascivious two.
 She was unfaithful to me there, as here,
 Adulterous in the skies, as upon earth.

MYRRHA

Ah, no! Let me speak.

ARDUIN

With a vile tongue
 Concealing more deception and bawdiness?
 Shall I abide mockery like a mummy?
 Have I spent all these years to bring you back
 Only to hear adultery is a passion
 Among the dead too? . . . I'll not suffer it.

MYRRHA

(as his hands go to her throat)

Oh hear me!

ARDUIN

You shall forfeit your restoral,
 As wanton women should, until no womb
 Of lies is left in the world! no resurrection
 Ever again be trusted . . .

MYRRHA

Sir, I'm not . . .

Sir, do not kill me. I will . . . Ion, help!

Sir, I will love you—

ARDUIN

By betraying him
 For whom you betrayed me? In the tomb do it then.

MYRRHA

(struggling)

Help . . . help . . . Help!

ARDUIN

No help is in him;

For there is more corruption where he lies
 Than any elixir in the world can change.
 Yet, it is fitting that his lecherous name
 Should be the last to wither in your throat.

(Strangles her. A pause)

(Then, looking at her)

So; it is done. Now, back to your tomb,
 Which I will bury in the desert sands
 So deep that not eternity shall find it.

(Stopping distressed, as he drags her toward the sarcophagus)

And yet all is not well, as it should be,
 After so well-deserved a retribution.
 I now could weep . . . though blood, and not tears,
 Seems pressing pitifully to my eyes.

(Again gazing at her)

Oh Rhea, Oh my love, where is our youth,
 And where the nightingales that once we heard
 Singing of our betrothal in Provence?

(Changing)

But no, accursed face! It was weak thoughts
 And wanting that betrayed me. Back to your tomb
 And lie in it again—false to me
 Through sterile aeons of adultery.

(Drags her to the sarcophagus, but sees RHEA in it. Lets her slip
 from him slowly, as he stares bedazed. Then he half moans help-
 lessly)

What has befallen now? . . . Rhasis, where am I? . . .

(Calling and running wildly from door to door)

Rhasis! . . . Rhasis! . . . Rhasis! . . . Rhasis! . . . O-o-h!

(ION and RHASIS enter, in hurried alarm. Seeing MYRRHA'S
 limp body they go to her quickly)

ARDUIN

(staring desperately)

There's two of her . . . two. The evil powers

Have put some sick delusion upon me.

I've toiled too much against death amid them.

Men should not toil too much for any dream.

Men should not toil too much; there's madness in it.

(Wringing his hands he goes brokenly to the door and out)

THE END

AN ANCIENT GREEK, DYING

Come nearer, Charon . . .

I cannot step so far, into your boat;

For I must have some breath to say farewell

To her you waft me from,

Ere death sets us afloat.

MYCENAEAN REVENGE

The sea-kings of Crete, Phoenicia, and Sicily

Raped six coasts and a hundred women.

I was one of them . . . Pharon had me . . .

The breasts he fondled budded and bloomed

And fed the babe I begot with hatred . . .

And now my ravisher, Pharon, is doomed.

Hard it has been to wait for vengeance,

Slave in the house of a Cretan thief;

Filling afresh his chill amphorae

Dawn and night with oil and water.

But now my suckled son is a man—

And tonight shall ravish Pharon's daughter.

This is the way it shall be. At dusk,

When he returns from another raid

And calls for ten strong wines to lotion

His beard of blood and his blood of lust,

Then he will look for his tall young daughter
Who loathes his heat with a cold disgust.

Leaving his gypsum throne in the megaron,
Flinging the sistrum player aside,
Forth will he stride, by the fountain weeping
Like a lone slave, to his daughter's door.
There he will find her bound and ravished
And cold with hate as an unpaid whore.

Writhing veins will swell in his forehead,
Wild will he rage as a minotaur,
Till the loosed lips of his tall young daughter
Tell him his rapes have raped her too;
For her tongue is a fang of the snake-goddess,
Piercing the heart with poison through.

Then will he seek me. . . . But in a galley
I and my son and ten slaves more
With a cask of gold will set toward Ithaca—
Over a sea that has no track;
And Pharon may foam like a hound behind,
Till the vitals of him and the brain crack.

Round to the sea-kings then will the story
Go—and the fame of it shall pall
The wine-boards boast of every rover
Having a daughter budding breasts;
And each in his sleep shall start and shudder
And vow to refrain from raping-quests.

TARIM REPENTS

My soul once was pagan,
By body once flesh.
I was my own master,
Free from any mesh.
But now I go to the desert,
And God burns in the sand;

And if I flee to the mountain,
Its peak is His right hand.

The tavern vats ran ruddy;
Their ecstasy was mine;
And dancing-girls flung round me
Rhythm's beauteous vine.
But now the khan I rest in
Has ashes on the floor,
And the voice of God fills it,
That and nothing more.

I have become a question,
I have become a doubt,
Through which mystic fevers
Wander in and out.
Life now to me is only
A swaying minaret,
Which Death mounts thrice daily,
That I may not forget.

THE WIND'S WORD

A star that I love,
The sea, and I,
Spake together across the night.
'Have peace,' said the star,
'Have power,' said the sea;
'Yea!' I answered, 'and Fame's delight!'

The wind on his way
To Araby
Paused and listened and sighed and said,
'I passed on the sands
A Pharaoh's tomb:
All these did he have—and he is dead.'

FROM A FELUCCA

A white tomb in the desert,
An Arab at his prayers

Beside the Nile's dark water,
 Where the lone camel fares.
 An ibis on the sunset,
 A slow shadow at rest,
 And in the caravansary
 Low music for the guest.

Above the tawny city
 A gleam of minarets,
 Resounding the muezzin's
 Clear call as the sun sets.
 A mystery, a silence,
 A breathing of strange balm,
 A peace from Allah on the wind
 And on the sky his calm.

A SONG OF THE SECTS

(In a Jerusalem Tavern)

A Latin and Greek, praise God, are we, Armenian and Copt,
 And we're all drunk as drunk can be, for we've together sopped.
 Not one of us but spits at the creed the others mouth and purr,
 But we all believe, we all believe, in the Holy Sepulchre!

The Armenian sings:

The Copt comes out of Egypt-land, and with a braggart face
 He'll tell you that his fathers piled the Pyramids in place,
 In his Monophysite Christ we set no faith, the blasphemer!
 But we all believe, we all believe, in the Holy Sepulchre!

The Latin sings:

The Greek will curse you if you call his Ikons images,
 And damns your soul to Hell—no purgatory, if you please!
 About Procession of the Ghost he's prickly as a burr,
 But he believes, as we all believe, in the Holy Sepulchre!

The Copt sings:

Of heretics God leaves unburnt, Armenians are worst,
 They will not celebrate the Day, that was for Christ the first.

No wine with water mixed for them, as well mix heathen myrrh—
Or not believe, as we all believe, in the Holy Sepulchre!

The Greek sings:

The Latin swears his Roman Pope is judge infallible.
Wherefore you may be very sure the Devil from his skull
Will drink a toast unto all liars, who such a lie aver—
Though they believe, as we all believe, in the Holy Sepulchre!

The Four, again:

A Latin and Greek, praise God, are we, Armenian and Copt,
And we're all drunk as drunk can be, for we've together sopped.
Not one of us but hankers to hang all Jews on a juniper,
But we all believe, we all believe, in the Holy Sepulchre!

KING SOLOMON SINGS OF WOMEN

I have been lord and spouse to many women,
And sipped the honey of their lips and hair,
And found that in the end distaste was there,
Whether their beauty was of Jah or Rimmon.

Queens have I taken out of Set or Sheba,
And little handmaids with awe-stricken breath,
And breasted priestesses of Ashtoreth
Prouder than daughters of the kings of Reba.

And I have dallied with them in the palace,
To plash of fountains in the pallid night.
Framed have I ever found them for delight,
But in the morning as an empty chalice.

A thousand have I led in fair betrothal,
Berobed and ankleted and lapped in myrrh.
Yet not unsoothly have the priests of Hur
Assailed my house as but a bridal brothel.

For love is the anointing oil of passion,
And no king can a thousand times be crowned.

So in false oils have I too oft been drowned;
Or, loving not, have sinned, too, in my fashion.

Better it were that I had found one maiden
Clothed in a thousand veils of chastity
Than maids a thousand that all eyes could see
Were ready with my king's lust to be laden.

Better it were that I had sought for beauty
Wedded to wisdom in one breast and face.
For man, with such, can find a dwelling-place:
'Twixt many all his soul is tossed as booty.

For there is cavil ever at his curtain
And flesh-temptation ever in his sight.
By harlotry his strength is shorn each night.
Of but remorseful morrows is he certain.

Better it were some Ruth had crept all fearless
Into the threshing-floor of this, my heart—
Where chaff and grain seem never kept apart.
Had it been so, my pillow now were tearless.

And such an one, among the luring many,
I can remember, tall and straight and calm,
As rich in promised fruitage as the palm,
One to compare in wisdom-ways with any.

But to my chamber never with enticing
Came she—and should I call her, I, the King?
On such a wisp of vanity we swing
Away all that is sure for life's sufficing.

Now she is gone: nor know I how or whither.
But oft till day breaks and the shadows flee
I long to have her gaze again at me,
Like the young roe upon the mounts of Bether.

And through the harem aimlessly I wander,
With loathing sense and soul no beauties please.
Better a hive of stinging sterile bees,
Or a housetop on which alone to ponder.

For ever the childless and the childèd clamour
Each after gifts, up to the kingdom's crown.
And Pharaoh's daughter hears—wherefore the frown
Of Egypt from her brow must I enamour.

Sick am I of their glances and embraces,
Sad am I of their bickerings and strife.
A thousand wives have I—and yet no wife,
A thousand hills, yet no heart-sheltered places.

Wherefore I say, Women are as pomegranates,
Tempting our taste that we may spread their seed
Over the earth: as at creation's need
God scattered over the sky His teeming planets.

Or that as aloes are they, fair and fragrant
At first, but ah, how bitter at the end.
Adam would be in Eden, and God's friend,
Had Eve not, at the Serpent's touch, turned vagrant.

There is a spreading tree that men call *elah*.
Would I could lie beneath it with that one
Whose heart would be as moon after the sun.
Instead comes night—and pharaoh's daughter. *Selah*.

A CHARM TO BRING CHILDREN

(Egypt, A.D. 100)

Take twelve leaves of the male palm
And write on each the name of a god.
Wed each leaf to a lotus bloom
And bind the twain to a bulrush rod.
Walk with the stem betwixt your breasts
By the flooding Nile when the young moon shows,
Shadowy-pregnant, over the night.
Then—making the sign of Horus—
Thrice to the left and thrice to the right—
Call, to the wind of the Desert,
Great is the lady Isis!

CHARLES DI TOCCA

CHARACTERS

CHARLES DI TOCCA	Duke of Leucadia, Tyrant of Artá, etc.
ANTONIO DI TOCCA	His Son
HAEMON	A Greek Noble and Poet
BARDAS	Haemon's Friend
CARDINAL JULIAN	The Pope's Legate
AGABUS	A Mad Monk
CECCO	Seneschal of Di Tocca's Castle
FULVIA COLONNA	Under Charles's Protection
HELENA	Haemon's Sister
GIULIA	Serving Fulvia
PAULA	Serving Helena
LYDIA	} Revelers
PHAON	
ZOE	
BASIL	
NALDO	A Page
DIOGONES	A Supposed Philosopher
A Captain of the Guard, Soldiers, Guests, Attendants, etc.	

CHARLES DI TOCCA

ACT I

SCENE: A ruined temple of Apollo on the island Leucadia. Between broken columns and stones that make breaches paths cross. In the rear a cliff's edge stands precipitously above the sea, and the moon, rising off, floods the place rather desolately with brightness and shadow, which festive music from the distance trembles over.

On one of the paths forward ANTONIO waits in youthful impatience. But as two figures approach he steps back into a breach. The figures are revellers, ZOE and BASIL—he much older.

ZOE

Hurry, Basil! Hurry!

BASIL

We are not late.

ZOE

(pulling at him)

The dancing has begun! The duke himself
Has sent wine—a butt of it—for the revels!

BASIL

And must I break my bones to get at it?

Nay, Zoe! Wait!

(She drags him off incontinently)

(ANTONIO, coming from the breach, resumes his waiting. Suddenly he starts. FULVIA has entered, cloaked)

ANTONIO

Helen—?

FULVIA

A comely name, my lord.

ANTONIO

Ah, you?

My father's unforgetting Fulvia?

FULVIA

(smiling)

At least not Helena, whoe'er she be.

ANTONIO

And did I call you so?

FULVIA

Unless it is

These stones have tongue and passion.

ANTONIO

It was the night,

Recalling dreams of dim antiquity,

Worked in me.—But whence are you now—so late

And so alone, too?

FULVIA

From the Cardinal,

Who has but come.

ANTONIO

(looking off)

What comfort there?

FULVIA

A vain one.

The moody bolt of Rome broods over us.

ANTONIO

My father, then, has not promised to hush
His heresy and wisely sue for peace?

FULVIA

You walked with him today. What said he?

ANTONIO

(abashed)

True—

This afternoon I did. What may be done?

FULVIA

His strangeness grows. Thrice of late he has laughed,
Seeing the cross—but softly and almost
As if it were some sweet thing that he loved.

ANTONIO

(again inattentive)

As if . . . ? Pardon . . . He is strange, you say?

FULVIA

(drawing her cloak)

Stranger than is Antonio, his son,
Who but for some expectancy is vacant.

ANTONIO

I am. But stay, Fulvia, and listen!

Last night I dreamed of you. In vain, it seemed,
You strove to reach me out of the wild swirl
Of swift Charybdis into which I had sunk.

I woke strangled and you . . . (Starting) What cry was that?

FULVIA

(as both listen)

A woman's voice! . . . and hurrying here—alone!
No—with another!

ANTONIO

Go, then, Fulvia,

Some evil has befallen! It is she
I've waited for, Helena. Go, and leave us!

(Attends her off, then turns, as HELENA enters. PAULA is with
her and both are shaken with fright)

ANTONIO

My Helena! what is it? You are wan
And tremble as a blossom quick with fear
Of shattering. What is it?

HELENA

(in his arms)

Say, not true!

Oh, say it is not!

ANTONIO

What have you chanced upon?

HELENA

A precipice of ill—or so it seems!
Yet surely his incanted prophecies
Spring from no power but fantasy's!

ANTONIO

Now who, love,

Upon this island, or indeed in the world,
Can gather into his eye more than today?
Who prophesies?

HELENA

The mad monk Agabus! . . .

He met us as we passed and seized my hands,
As if indeed he could—as it is said—
Draw evil spirits from the air and learn
Of love and death from them . . . With wild looks
And wilder lips he vented upon my ear

Bodings more wild than both. "Sappho!" he cried,
 "Sappho!" and probed my eyes as if he saw
 Destiny move dark-visaged in their deeps.
 Then moaned, "So young to cease! so young, so young!"
 Then gazed out into awful vacancy
 And whispered hotly, following his gaze,
 "The Shadow!"

ANTONIO

How? What Shadow? whose?

HELENA

I know not!
 But thrice he said it thus, gazing and moaning.

ANTONIO

But did not harm you?

HELENA

Only with fear and dread.

ANTONIO

Then no harm's done that is a harm. He's but
 A poor addled monk—driven, perhaps,
 Out of his wits by such prophecies.

HELENA

And not a lover? who, they say, in youth
 Was once most unfeelingly forsaken
 And in avenge has leagued himself with Hell,
 That lends him sight of ills to lovers' hearts?

ANTONIO

No more than you or I!

HELENA

Then, my lord,
 I'll quench all thought of him—and trust *your* eyes
 That tell me love is master of all ills—
 And you of all love master!

ANTONIO

And of you? . . .

(As they sit)

Let winds flow again into the night, then,
And flute us lover songs of happiness!

HELENA

Nor dare upon a duller note while here
We tryst beneath the moon?

ANTONIO

My perfect Greek!

(Lifts her face)

Athene looks again out of your lids
And Aphrodite warms your every limb.

HELENA

Not Aphrodite! No, Antonio!
Not she!

ANTONIO

And wherefore not?

HELENA

It was here,
Beside this very temple's gate she once
Appeared to great Sappho and enticed her
To leap wildly over the cliff yonder
Into the waves' oblivion below!

ANTONIO

And can you read such terror in a tale?
Too quickly you are unstrung.

HELENA

Forgive me then.

ANTONIO

(broodingly)

And yet there is—

HELENA

Is what, Antonio?

ANTONIO

Nothing. I who must ebb with you and flow
A little was moved.

HELENA

You, Antonio? Oh!
I'll change my fears to laughter if a fancy
Can so unmettle you!

ANTONIO

(with ardor) A kiss, then—
To rid us of the chill of this numb awe
That winds about our joy!

HELENA

(assenting) Kisses alone
Can drive gloom out of the world.

ANTONIO

(gaily) And could they still—
If I pressed other lips?

HELENA

(pushing away) Other, sir?
You should not know that any other lips
In the world could be pressed! I'll have no kiss
But his who's blind to every mouth but mine.

ANTONIO

And if—I'm not?

HELENA

Then it is time I go!

ANTONIO

Why, so it is . . . perhaps! The moon's abed.

HELENA

Oh, oh, she's hardly up! And yet he says
Abed—that she's abed! Oh, oh, oh—
There's gloom in the world again!

ANTONIO

(with a gayer kiss) That now is gone?

HELENA

Not all, I think.

ANTONIO

Two for so small a gloom?

HELENA

(looking off)

Tonight the vainest glooms seem ominous
As cloud flakes flung fluttering up the west.

(Starting)

But some one comes!

PAULA

(approaching) My lady, we must go.

You should not be here.

HELENA

It . . . is Agabus!

Antonio, see! . . . He's following us here.

What shall be done? . . . Do not let him touch me
Again, even a moment, with his madness!

ANTONIO

He shall not. Stand with Paula, till he passes.

(Turns as AGABUS enters ragged, unkempt, his gaze searching
the air—until he sees them)

ANTONIO

Good monk—

AGABUS

Lovers! lovers! Lord have none of them!

(Crosses himself)

They'd give me gold to pray for their two souls.
Not I! not I! . . . For love is but a brew
Of fiery sin—and but one thing can quench it—
The Shadow!

ANTONIO

Friend, what Shadow? None is here.

AGABUS

I followed him this way. His name is Death.
I'd have him for my brain; it shakes with fever.
(He goes, leaving a chill of awe upon them)

ANTONIO

There . . . he is gone!

HELENA

(numbly)

Gone . . .

ANTONIO

And you are calm?

HELENA

Of impotence—as one who in a grave
Awakes and waits.

ANTONIO

He is but mad!

HELENA

And yet

The earth seems as wind under my feet,
The sea a shroud winding about us coldly.
Clasp me again—close to you—Antonio,
Warm the cold moan and misery of fear
Out of my veins!

ANTONIO

There'll be no shroud, my own,
But wedding wreaths and robes and pageantry.
And you shall be my Sappho—but through joys
Such as shall legend ecstasy about
Our knitted names, when distant lovers dream.

HELENA

I'll fear no more, then. But, my lord, let us
Have done with secrecy and be henceforth
Open in love! Let us tell your father,
And too my brother Haemon, of our hope
And happy betrothal.

ANTONIO

Now? We cannot, dear.

HELENA

And why, sir, cannot, if in very truth
You are the god I worship? . . . Say we can!

ANTONIO

With Haemon bitter still against my father,
And therefore against me? . . . No, I say,
He must be won with favor first, or station.
And you are both Greek—a name that till
Today never entered my father's ear
But it came out of his mouth headlong with curses.

HELENA

Yet he of late has often smiled upon me!

ANTONIO

My father? no. You've dreamt, or wished it so.

HELENA

Then have you also dreamt! For he looks on me
As you, when in the garden under the moon
You call me—

ANTONIO

I will call you so no more!

(Another kiss)

HELENA

No dear name more?

ANTONIO

The fairest name of earth,
Were it a glowing miracle of beauty,
Could no more reveal my Helena
Than can a taper's ray the rim of night!

HELENA

Yet I'll not think Antonio unkind
If sometimes one trips out upon his tongue.

ANTONIO

Or on my father's either?

HELENA

If for your sake!

ANTONIO

He smiled, you say?

HELENA

As one forgetting pain.

ANTONIO

Perhaps. For some unwonted softness seems
To sway him. Yesterday he asked for wine,
Dancing and song.

HELENA

Then tell him! for we live

In peril years; and secrecy must seem
Yokemate of guilt, if unwittingly
He chances upon it.

PAULA

(off) My lady! (entering) Quick!
Come away quick. I think I saw your brother!

HELENA

Haemon? here? with whom? . . . Is he alone?

PAULA

No, with another!

HELENA

Speak to him, Antonio—
If it is so. For though hot broodings smoulder
Bitterly in him—

ANTONIO

(cloaking her) Go, and if I can
I'll quench them, with kindness.

HELENA

May it be so!

ANTONIO

And may my Helena be, by day then,
My joy-begetting lark, and by night
My nightingale—not a sad bird of boding!

HELENA

Think of me so—and so I shall be, ever.
(Hurries away with PAULA)

ANTONIO

(looking off, then amazed)
Haemon it is! But who with him? My father?
Smiling, jesting, complaisant? . . . What can it mean?
(He steps back into the breach as the TWO enter)

CHARLES

So, you will go no further with me?

HAEMON

(loathly)

Sir—

CHARLES

The moon's a luring mistress! See, she foots it
As silvery up the sky as a lover.
If you desert her now, it can be
For naught but a more amorous rendezvous.
Who is it? . . . Ah, young blood and Spring and night!

HAEMON

No rendezvous, my lord.

CHARLES

Some new lay then

You muse upon?

HAEMON

Yes—a lay.

CHARLES

Of love?

(Smiling)

The word, you see, founts easy to my lips—
Being, as you will learn, much in my thoughts.

HAEMON

I do not understand.

CHARLES

You shall, and soon,
My Greek. But to your lay! My mood's more festive.
(Goes—waving back to him)

HAEMON

(with gnawing hatred)
What treachery will he now bring to birth
To add a further curse to the tyranny
His soldiers have despoiled our land with,
Our women, too, tempted shamelessly?
If I could only—!

ANTONIO

(stepping out)

Haemon . . .

HAEMON

(startled) You! Spying here?
Like any scorpion hid in a crevice?

ANTONIO

No!

Believe me!

HAEMON

Not if Christ dying upon
The cross bade me to, spawn of Italy!

ANTONIO

There's room between your tone and courtesy.

HAEMON

And shall be, while I'm readier to bend
Over a beggar's pain than prince's fingers.

ANTONIO

I think you know me better—

HAEMON

Than to believe
You're not Antonio, son of Charles di Tocca?

ANTONIO

I'd be your friend.

HAEMON

So would he—and he smiles.

(Turns away)

A miracle—if you are not his son!

ANTONIO

Or if, being so born, I do not now—?

HAEMON

Grind me under your heel? as his might
Has ground Leucadia, the land I love?
A friend, he? And you? . . . Were he Tamerlane
And mine the skull to cap a pyramid
Of bloody foes, I'd tell him—

ANTONIO

You are blind!

HAEMON

To lord Antonio's charms and tender graces?
His tasseled sword and doublet, worn sublimely?
No, my lord, I'm sure that any lock
Wreathing your brow would tempt the chastest fingers!

ANTONIO

And yet my anger's silent.

HAEMON

Give it tongue then
To cry unleashed, as Bardas swears it would,
But for some subtle and concealed intent.
Your father, with his might, seized this land
And smothered mine within a sunless cell,
Because, being a Greek and still a Greek,
He would not be a slave! And ruthless now
He scatters death, or cruelty, that's worse,
About him like a pest.

ANTONIO

But with excuse!

The times are tyrannous and men, like beasts,
Find mercy preservation's enemy.
Yet here's my hand—and all my heart with it—
As pledge that—

HAEMON

You'll be false? as he has?

(To BARDAS entering)

Bardas, I have sought you, all day.

BARDAS

And I, you, Haemon . . . And you, my lord;
My way was to your door with a request.

ANTONIO

Which I will gladly grant, if so I may.

BARDAS

Why then, to speak bluntly, I am in love.

HAEMON

(amazed)

In love? . . . you?

BARDAS

As never before, if ever
I was before. I love your sister, Haemon.
Nay more. I am idolatrous before
Her foot's least print and cannot breathe or pray
But where she's some time been and left a Heaven.

HAEMON

By God's heart! This is a strange time
And place to spout it, like a crank lose!

BARDAS

Necessity's not overduplicate—
As the request I've come here to make
Will show. Antonio has been most apt,

In all love's skill, they say . . . I beg of him
To sue Helena for me.

HAEMON

(more astounded) Is this jest
Or insult . . . ?

BARDAS

Let him answer.

HAEMON

Is it—?

BARDAS

Peace!

His words sown on her ear, I am told,
Would not lie fruitless though he bade her yield
More than her most. So—

ANTONIO

Why, I will then, plainly.
Helena, whom I've met, would hardly thank
Any who told her eyes where they should love.

BARDAS

That is your answer?

ANTONIO

It is one less strange

Than your request.

BARDAS

I must recall a debt then.

I once saved your life, my lord.

ANTONIO

You did,
And bravely! . . . and I have often sought
Occasion to repay you. If this be one
I am distressed. I cannot plead your suit.

BARDAS

Or *will* not? . . . Can or *will* not, my lord?

ANTONIO

Ask me for any service on your foes,
For friendship—or faith—you are aloof to,
For anything that will, right and honor
May give with nicety—and I'll be wings,
More, drudge to your desire!

HAEMON

(blazing) And I will add
That if you still insult her—

BARDAS

Peace, I say,
Until you hear the reason of my rankness.
A little since Antonio's noble father
Gave a command in seal to Helena,
As she fared home, to let herself be led
Into his halls—which she must henceforth "honor!"

HAEMON

(staring)
His father?

ANTONIO

Mine, to Helena?

BARDAS

Ha, well feigned!
None will suspect his gallantry; or, if so,
His son's.

ANTONIO

You are deceived!

BARDAS

(shrugging) I have held
The house of Charles di Tocca bold and bloody
Or harsh or tyrannous till now—but empty
At least of all lies in deed or speech.

ANTONIO

But of this thing and its intent, I'm naked!
As naked as the wonder of my face.
For Paradises brimming with delight
I would not lay one shadow weight of shame
On—her you name!

BARDAS

A pretty protest—but

A breath too heavenly.

ANTONIO

This is not then!

You saved my life—once; but now your words
Are thrice harder to bear than loss of it.
Know that between Helena and shame
I stand with flaming heart and fearless hand!
(He strides off, leaving them dashed)
(a pause)

HAEMON

If this be false, it wears the mien of truth.

BARDAS

I will not trust him.

HAEMON

Helena was seized?

BARDAS

Though he "with flaming heart" stands between!
Have we no flesh to understand this passion?
Will he, bound to the wings of bold ambition,
Wed her undowered worth?
I would not cast the fairness of his name,
For fair it is, into suspicion's fire,
But doubts in me are dumb.

HAEMON

By Heaven and Hell,
He would not venture on it!

BARDAS

Yet he has!

For as I hurried away to find you here
 I passed the rogue Cecco, the duke's spy
 Or seneschal, as you please, muddled in wine
 And spouting to a jade this mimicry:
 ' "Sweet Helena! Fair Helena!"—Oh wench,
 My young lord Antonio knows sound nuts!
 And sly; why hark 'e now, he gets the duke
 To seize the maid and fetch her to him!
 And hark to this: I've heard him, late o' nights,
 Puffing her name out of his window with
 As many sighs of passion—with as many—
 As June has buds! "Sweet Helena!" he says,
 "Fair Helena! my sun and moon and stars,
 My breath shall be the sky for thee—come lay
 Thy head on it!" . . . Oh, wench! . . . Oh! oh, oh!
 He knows sound nuts, for she's a rare damsel—
 Yet not so rare but I will make a sluice
 Between her purse and mine!'

HAEMON

(pale)

If this be true—!

BARDAS

If it is not, the vilest liar of earth
 Still lives and breathes. For though I struck him down,
 He swore to it again. So I left him
 And found Helena gone, as he vowed,
 Helena who has been all purity!

HAEMON

And all . . . Oh God, God, have I so long
 Guarded the roots of her unfolding years
 Only to see unchastest cruelty
 Pluck her white bloom to ease his idle sense
 One fragrant hour?

BARDAS

If it is so, no flowers
Should ever bloom again, but only weeds
Whose withering hurst no hearts.

HAEMON

(grimly) And if a wind
Of Hell can wreck him, I invoke it now.

BARDAS

And may I be the rock on which he breaks.

(Listening)

But stay. The revellers come.

(Music is heard, nearing)

Let us step back until their mirth has passed.

(They do so, into the breach. The revellers enter: ZOE, BASIL,
LYDIA and PHAON lead them, dancing and singing)

Bacchus, hei! was a god, hei-yo!

(The vine! a fig for the rest!)

With locks green-crowned and lips red-warmed!

(The vine, the vine's the best!)

He loved maid, O-o-ay! hei-yo!

(The vine! a maiden's breast!)

He pressed the grape and kissed the maid.

(The cuckoo builds no nest!)

LYDIA

(breaking away)

You hold kisses too cheap, master Phaon!

Mine have filled my purse often, sir!

A pretty gallant of Naples gave me this ring

Last night—for but one!

Another from Egypt this bracelet!

But he looked so sad when he did

I'd not have cared had he given me naught!

BASIL

Here then, Lydia, take this jewel, here!

But remember—

LYDIA

(refusing it)
 They say the ladies of Venice
 Ride with their lovers there all night
 In boats . . .
 And the very moon there
 Shines more passionately.
 Is it true, Phaon? is it?

PHAON

Yes. But kiss me!
 The jewel's yours . . . but kiss me!
 Be mine tonight—no other's.
 We'll prate of Venice another time.

LYDIA

Of kisses another time! Keep the jewel!
 I won't have it! I won't!

PHAON

But why? why?
 Are you turning nun again?
 A soft, silly nun—
 With a grey gown for shoulders
 That are growing a little—

LYDIA

Devil! they are not!
 A lover called them round and fair, last night!
 And I've been sick! . . . Cruel, you are cruel!
 (The other revellers are heard)
 There—they're coming back.

PHAON

Never mind, my girl.
 But you mustn't scorn a man's blood when it's afire.
 (The others re-enter, singing as before. Then all join in, except
 ZOE and BASIL, who sit down panting)

ZOE

(as the others dance off again)
 Oh, oh, my Basil! Isn't it brave? Oh!

But wine for us, my Bacchus! . . . Pour, pour!

(Laughing as they drink)

Ho, ho, my god!

You wheeze like a crossbow!

Is it years, my wooer, years?

(Saddened by the thought, she sighs)

BASIL

(getting his breath)

Oh Lord! There you go again, Zoe!

Sighs!

Now look for showers!

ZOE

Basil, you were my first lover—

Except the duke Charles.

Did you see that Helena

When she got his command?

The duke's, I mean?

(HAEMON starts sharply)

I was like that once!

(Her eyes fill)

BASIL

Fiends, nymphs, and saints!

Tears now, as I said!

Stop it, Zoe, stop it!

Would you have mine leak

And drive me to a monastery for shelter?

ZOE

(more sadly and half absently)

She lay by the river dead,

A broken reed in her hand—

A nymph whom an idol god had wed

And led from her maidenland.

BASIL

Stop it! I say!

Or I'll wish I'd been born a heathen.

ZOE

He told me, Basil, the duke did,
 That I should live like a great lady,
 That they should kiss my hand and curtsy to me.
 He meant but jest.
 I feared—feared! . . . but I loved him!

BASIL

Now, my damsel—!

ZOE

(continuing as before)

The god was the great god Jove,
 Two notes would the bent reed blow:
 The one was sorrow—the other love,
 Enwove with a woman's woe!

BASIL

Songs and snakes!
 Instead of this
 I'll take a Dominican's funeral!
 I'd as lief crawl bare-kneed to Rome,
 And mouth the Pope's heel!
 Oh blessed Turks with their remorseless harem!

ZOE

(ending her song)

She lay by the river dead;
 And he at feasting forgot.
 The gods, shall they be disquieted
 By dread of a mortal's lot?

(Wiping her eyes she laughs at him hysterically. Then:)

Up! up, my Bacchus!

Up, lad! up!

There's many a bliss for us yet.

(She drags him away, singing)

He loved maid, O-o-ay! hei-yo!

(*The vine! a maiden's breast!*)

(HAEMON and BARDAS start from the breach, much moved)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: An audience hall in the castle of Charles, the next afternoon. The dark-stained walls have been festooned with vines and flowers. On the left is the ducal throne; by it a wine table. Right and left are draped doors, and in the rear two low-set windows that face inland. Between them is a shrine. Brilliant sunlight.

Enter CHARLES, who looks around and smiles with subtle content, then summons CECCO, who enters.

CHARLES

The princess Fulvia!

CECCO

She's coming, sir.

(He goes. A pause)

(FULVIA enters, constrainedly)

FULVIA

My lord, flowers and vines upon these walls,
That seem always to bear the memory
And mist of grief? What does it mean?

CHARLES

(jocosely)

A grave thing.

They sprung, a greedy multitude, in the fields.
Citron and olive were left hungry by them.
So, through the might that's mine, they are quelled.
Is it not well?

FULVIA

A magic dwells in flowers
To waft me back to childhood. (Takes some) Poor pluckt buds,
If they could speak, like children torn from the breast.

CHARLES

(frowning)

Now are you full of sighs and pity?

FULVIA

And more.

Of heavy doubt as well.

CHARLES

What so divides you?

FULVIA

This Greek. I do not understand.

CHARLES

Nor guess?

You have not seen nor spoken to her?

FULVIA

No.

CHARLES

We'll have her. (To CECCO who reenters) Go tell
the lady Helena

I want her.

CECCO

Here, my lord?

CHARLES

And at once.

(Then, as he goes)

But you must know, Fulvia, she's frightened,
Fearing her father found—too deep a rest
Here in our care. Yet since I smile on her
She has a hope that holds her dread in leash.
Why do you cloud?

FULVIA

I would this were undone.

CHARLES

This beauty that I crave? this promise of
Contentment? this desire that for so long—
(HELENA enters)

CHARLES

(going to her)

Nay, Greek, do not falter. This is Fulvia,
Our more than trusted friend, who is as heart

And health about our doors. You must know her.
I'll leave you to it.

FULVIA

Do, my lord.

CHARLES

A while,

But only for a while, therefore be brief.

FULVIA

As may be.

CHARLES

Since the Cardinal is coming

Your *may* must be amended to a *must*.

(He goes, FULVIA turns and looks at HELENA)

FULVIA

Girl, child—

HELENA

Why do you look at me so strangely?

FULVIA

You're very fair!

HELENA

Till yesterday I thought

All the world was;—that all its wide borders

Were brimming up with my full happiness.

FULVIA

But now begin to fear that it may be

Only a sieve to everything save grief?

HELENA

Or a far graver thing! For I seem girt

By dreads that whisper what I dare not think

Or see shaped forth.

FULVIA

Upon the morrow's face?

HELENA

(more troubled)

You look at me—I think you look at me
As if—

FULVIA

No, child.

HELENA

Why am I in this place?
Why bidden here? A fear pervades you, too!

FULVIA

No, no—or only a moment. Or if so,
Has vanished quite, ashamed, as I am,
Of its too naked idleness.

HELENA

Yet you feared!

FULVIA

Be calm. Do not tremble. Beauty like yours
Is better so.

HELENA

And best, I think, unborn—
If you, a great lady, see a shadow
Reach out at me thus, yet lend no light!
And I am not a child . . . but were I,
A moment of this dread might bring age.
By all, then, that's gentle and womanly,
By love, the love that women bear to men,
By happiness too fleeting to tread earth,
I beg you tell the fear your heart so hides.

FULVIA

(walking away, then back)
You are the guest of Charles di Tocca.

HELENA

No,
For guests are bidden—not commanded. (Low)
Where,

Where can Antonio be gone? All day
No token, quieting!

FULVIA

(startled) Token from him?
Girl! from Antonio? . . . Is this true?

CHARLES

(reentering)
Truth, Fulvia, in books or out of them,
Has brewed more tears than lies. But why now
Does it, linked to Antonio's mere name,
Prey so upon your peace?

FULVIA

(at a loss) My lord—

CHARLES

No matter.
Tomorrow's soon enough for any trouble.
But you, my gentle Helena, should put
More merriment upon your lips and lids,
And this (gives pearls) upon the lustre of your throat.
With Roman eyes to gaze on you, I'd have
You at your beauty's best. How now, trembling?
(As she turns to go)
Yet is the lily lovelier in the wind!
(Gazes after her)

FULVIA

My lord—

CHARLES

I am, as titles go, Fulvia—
But not to you!

FULVIA

To me as well, my lord,
Unless—

CHARLES

You say it again? Am I then
Two lords?

FULVIA

Today at least. But quench these jests.

CHARLES

In tears and sighs? Where shall I borrow them?

FULVIA

(turning away)

So be it!

CHARLES

Why do you sound that "so" as if
Naught could again be well?

FULVIA

... What if this hope

You muse upon—

CHARLES

Helena?

FULVIA

Should prove
A pang of serpent bitterness?

CHARLES

Why should it?
For a mere "if" must I pluck it from me?

FULVIA

So I believe.

CHARLES

Pluck and cast it from me?
If, Fulvia, you do not wish to rouse
A very flux of wrath in me, a maelstrom,
Remember that this joy though new is mine,
And . . . there, you see! I rage.

FULVIA

That I may cease
And say no more? No, you are on a flood
Whose sinking may be rapid down to horror.

For she, this girl . . . it has been long since you
Gave license rein and spur upon your will;
Do not so now!

CHARLES

(surprised) License?

FULVIA

She is all morn
And dream and dew. Awake her not on terror.

CHARLES

On? Helena on terror and not on—?
Oh ho! ho! Oh ho!

FULVIA

You have laughed nobler.

CHARLES

Friend of my unrepaying years, no.
(Ceasing to laugh)
But you, who are aware how all my youth
Was given over to stern, sterile ambition,
Should know that I am near the sloth of age.

FULVIA

If it is so, then surely—

CHARLES

And that joy,
This springing up of hope and joy in me
After so long a loneness, is no prelude
To license; but that I have found a door
To let in Heaven itself upon my heart,
And that did I not laugh to see your dread
Write "license" on it—

FULVIA

You will wed her then?

CHARLES

So fully that I'll let her every wish,
The least of them, be as a crown and sceptre,

To wave a swift fulfillment to her feet!
She shall leave graves unfilled, if she pleases;
Or fill them, if her mood is one of rancor,
With all who trouble her.

FULVIA

Infatuate man!
Will you build kingdoms thus upon the wind,
And empires on a girl's ungiven heart?

CHARLES

Unto such love as mine, all things are given.

FULVIA

All things but love!

CHARLES

(inwardly) Have not her eyes sought mine
With warm and tender pleading—as to her cheeks
Came helpless hurried roses from her heart?
And have they not lingered so, still tender,
As if they somehow found, in my own,
The likeness of a visitant dear dream?

FULVIA

(meaningly)
The likeness of a *dream*?

CHARLES

I tell you she
Is fixed within the centre of my need
As youth and fiercest passion could not fix her.
Ecstatically as May she has burst on
My barren years. And pain, and decay,
And doubt, that mystery wounds us with, and wrong,
Flee at the merest whisper of her name.

FULVIA

But if your heat and coronet do not
Avail with her, as might the wonted charm
Of equal years and beauty?

CHARLES

Then—why then—

An avalanche of perilous despair
Might slip from me. Hope of her once taken,
And all the flaming hungers of my heart
Might rush like thwarted lightnings into the void.
(Sits obsessed and clenched. ANTONIO enters)

ANTONIO

As you commanded, sir, it has been done.

CHARLES

What, boy? . . . Ah! the robbers? I remember.
Open your news, then. I will listen
Without restraint—since it is not of failure.

ANTONIO

We found their murderous cove and seized them in it,
And as our law commands bound and flung them
Over the cliff.

CHARLES

So with all traitors be it!

ANTONIO

And all who would be, sir!

CHARLES

Well, you're swift.
There's more in you than meekness, and musing;
Or than your mother's gentleness.

ANTONIO

Else, sir,
My name were di Tocca, not myself.

CHARLES

You shall have more than love for this—but now
We wait the Cardinal.

ANTONIO

He's at the gate.
I passed him coming.

CHARLES

Then he'll miss no welcome,
Since you and Fulvia press it. And perhaps—
(To FULVIA, smiling)
Give me that cross you wear—

ANTONIO

Sir, this is good!
We do indeed beseech you patiently
To hear him—since he's powerful in Rome.

CHARLES

Then you, boy, draw out of this solitude
You've lately sunken in. You should think but
Of silly sighs and kisses, rhymes and trysts.
Must I, a father, teach your youth passion?
(A stir is heard at the gate)
Draw out!

ANTONIO

May I have words of that with you?
I've sought to, often.

CHARLES

Next time you will find me.
(Turns to CECCO, who enters urgently)

CECCO

The Cardinal, your grace.

CHARLES

Then bid our guests,
And let the new-come dancers, from Egypt,
Be ready. The insistencies of Rome
May need appeasing pleasure ere we've done.
Summon the Lady Helena. She is in
Her chamber. We must have her beauty too.

ANTONIO

Helena, sir? . . . Surely—

CHARLES

Well? what now?

(As ANTONIO hesitates)

Fulvia, this callow son of mine
Must be looked to. Nature has curdled in him.
Yet if our court had eyes tempting enough
To drown his heart, I'd swear it has been done.

(Goes to the throne)

FULVIA

(low)

Antonio, no more, now.

CHARLES

(half hearing)

No more?

Of what? You have secrets from me?

FULVIA

(deftly)

Alas!

He scorns even a drop of confidence
On my too thirsty questions.

CHARLES

(laughing)

Does the villain

Indeed so tightly seal his spirits from us?

FULVIA

Put him to prison on stale bread, my lord.
Perhaps he's full of treasons.

CHARLES

And may spill?—

You hear, boy? Though I trust you as a son,
Justice is not impossible upon you.

(A bugle sounds. The guests begin to arrive. JULIAN leading
his suite; FULVIA with GIULIA; HAEMON, BARDAS and
HELENA with PAULA)

JULIAN

(before CHARLES)

Peace, worthy duke!

CHARLES

And more, lord Cardinal.
For more, I judge, is needed to enlarge
My worthiness with you, and with great Rome.

JULIAN

Well spoken; with a weight, my lord, that leans
Toward harmony.

CHARLES

I will lean further then.
For since the hot schisms I am accused of
Concern as well these guests who greet you here,
I humbly disavow all heresy—
For faith's the very founding-stone of life—
And seek at your absolving lips release
For my contumacies. Nor shall I shun
The lash and needed weight of penitence.
(A murmur of approval)

JULIAN

I could not with divine Omniscience, sir,
Demand more wisdom of you than you offer.
Who so confesses plants beneath his feet
A step to scale all arrogance and wrong.
Our Holy Pope's conditions shall be read:
(Motions a SECRETARY)
Pledge them consent—a mere formality—
And you shall be briefly and fully free.

CHARLES

I'll hear them then, humbly. Let him read.

SECRETARY

(opening a scroll augustly)
"Whereas the duke di Tocca of these isles
And Arta has offended—"

JULIAN

Pass the offence.

The penalty, already preaccepted,
Makes the offence nothingness. Read on.

SECRETARY

"Therefore the duke di Tocca, humbling himself,
Is ordered to pay into our vaults at Rome
Two hundred golden ducats."

CHARLES

(largely) It shall be three.

SECRETARY

"And send a hundred men armed and eager
Against all foes that threaten Italy."

CHARLES

Three there, too: a man for every ducat.
Antonio, my son, shall see to it.

(JULIAN bows, more pleased)

SECRETARY

(dubiously)

"The duke di Tocca likewise is commanded
To yield into our hands the princess Fulvia,
Who fled her father's house and rightful marriage."
(A stir. FULVIA quickly turns to JULIAN)

FULVIA

You told me nothing of this, lord Cardinal!

JULIAN

My silence, like my speech, is not my own.

CHARLES

(who has darkened, ominously)
We'll hear a measure more. Let him read on.

SECRETARY

(hesitating now)

"And for the better amity and weal
Of Italy and Christ's most Holy Church,
This duke is bidden to wed with Beatrice
Of Venice . . . If he grants us this obedience
His rebel sins shall melt quickly to rest
Under the healing calm of full forgiveness."

CHARLES

(with a wrath at first calm)

A mild, a courteous, oh a modest Pope!
I must do thus and so, with knee and toe,
But when it is done, why—it's not enough!
I must uproot out of my heart a friend,
Who fled a father's house and searing cruelty,
And cast her back in the flames! And I must yield
My growing years, that fare toward the grave,
To the cold clasp of an unloving hand!

(Leaning toward JULIAN)

It is too little, my lord Cardinal.
Return again, I pray you, to Rome
And say . . . that for penance I should swear
Also that my true son is shame-begot,
And that my kin should stifle in the damp
Of Tiber prisons . . . And it is impious too
That any still should trust my love. Beseech
His Holiness for instant death upon them!

JULIAN

This rancor is your answer?

CHARLES

A mite of it!

(Rises convulsively)

The rest is I will wed where I will wed
Though every hill of earth raise up a Pope
To bellow at me thunderous damnation!

(Then, falling back)

I—I will—I—

FULVIA

(to CECCO) Bring wine for him at once.

ANTONIO

(as it is brought)

Spare yourself more, lord Cardinal, and go.

(JULIAN proudly does so, with his suite)

CHARLES

(recovering)

Stand off! Off, I say! (Looking around) He is gone?

It seemed as if demons of Hell swung on me

And strangled me. Wine, more wine; pour.

(After drinking it)

You must forgive me, friends, this sudden wrench

On your expected pleasure. One too quickly

Made saint—as I was—stands but feebly.

But now I will atone. (To CECCO) Where's Diogenes?

His tangled skein of wisdom shall divert us.

(DIOGENES comes forward to the throne. Before he can speak,

AGABUS enters staring)

CHARLES

(amazed)

Who's this?

AGABUS

I followed him. He beckoned me,

The Shadow did. . . . Whither has he gone?

CHARLES

I say, who's this broke from the grave upon us?

AGABUS

(still searching)

Upon the air he sped—and there was cold

And dread behind him—cold and dread and horror.

(Stopping at HELENA)

To *her* he came, here! His earthless finger

Is laid upon her beauty—and she rots—!

ANTONIO

Accurséd monk!

AGABUS

To dust! she rots to dust!

ANTONIO

(seizing him)

This is too much. (To a GUARD) Take him without at once.
Women should not be stricken thus with fear.

AGABUS

(witlessly)

Christ save all men—and women too—but lovers.
(Crosses himself)

CHARLES

(intrigued)

But who is he, Antonio?

ANTONIO

He is mad, sir,
With a pestilence of evil prophecy.
Better compel him forth.

CHARLES

No. I'll hear him.

(To AGABUS)

Come nearer, friend. . . . Why do you go about
The world thus, seeing invisible things?

AGABUS

(close to him)

A lover—another lover! And he burns
In vain! . . . Come, we'll go away, sir.
There is a cave we'll go into and curse her.

CHARLES

Off, slime! with your vileness and madness.

AGABUS

(turning away to his search)

Christ save all men—and women too but . . . Did

The Shadow not pass here? I followed him.

(He goes gazing. The guests stand awed and silent)

CHARLES

(relieved)

He is obsessed, utterly—as Antonio

Forewarned us.

A GUEST

Sir . . . yes. But I must go,

If you'll permit.

ANOTHER

And I, my lord.

A THIRD

And I.

CHARLES

Never—or you are enemies—not friends!

My hospitality is up. This pall on us

Will pass and—

A LADY

Shall we women stay, my lord?

CHARLES

A grudging wind blows us away from mirth,

But change of it will quickly bring us in;

And change it shall. We've lute and dancing yet.

2ND LADY

Oh, dance! There are dancers?

CHARLES

From the Nile.

(To CECCO)

Fetch them.

2ND LADY

Cleopatra's Nile?

CHARLES

Her own!

And sinuous as Nile waters is their grace.

(The dancers enter, dance to applause, then go)

A GUEST

Bravo! Bravo!

CHARLES

Did they not whirl it well,

With limbs like swallow wings upon the air?

1ST LADY

'Twas witchery!

2ND LADY

Such eyes and hair!

3RD LADY

Was Anthony,

I wonder, stolen thus by Cleopatra?

Wrapped about by motions that would seize

His senses to an ecstasy? . . . Oh, oh,

To dance so!

CHARLES

(laughing) And so steal an Anthony?

We'll frame a law on thieving of men's hearts.

3RD LADY

Vainly! It is a theft men like the most.

CHARLES

When the thief leaves her own instead. But stay:

We've more than dance to round us into port.

A lute, Cecco. Haemon, our good poet,

Shall sing us a new lay. But we warn him

His every word must dip its syllables

In Pindar's spring, to trip as lightly forth.

(The lute is brought)

HAEMON

(refusing it)

I have no lay.

CHARLES

(gaily) Of love? None of love?

That builds a paradise of kisses? thinks

The infinite's bound up in an embrace,

And that its sighs are hurricanes of pain?

Its tears simmering seas of misery?

(Again laughs)

HAEMON

I will not sing.

CHARLES

(clouding) How now, and why, if you

Would not scare off again our timid cheer?

HAEMON

My sister . . . No, I will not!

CHARLES

By God's saints,

I had an honor pluckt to laurel you,

A thing of noble worth, a—

HAEMON

On dishonor

No honor can sit well!

CHARLES

(staring) Upon dishonor?

Is *this* my reward, then? . . . Am I twice

Today to be heated? Is new bliss

Raised from the dead in me but to fall back

As stone ere it has breathed?

HAEMON

Let Antonio

Say which of you it was, then, who—

FULVIA

(warningly)

Haemon!

HAEMON

Let him say who on yesterday—

FULVIA

(low to him)

Quicksands

Of desperate calamity lie there!

CHARLES

(staring)

Of desperate calamity? Wherefore?
In the blind power and passing of this night
Is there conspiracy, a midwiving
Of some plot against me? . . . We must have mirth,
I tell you again, mirth—and instantly,
Though it be only laughter at damned souls.

HAEMON

(fiercely)

And I must make it? I, with lute and lay
Doting upon dishonor? . . . Give me my sister!
Strip me of wealth and life, all that I have,
For you've the might to do it. But let her
Not meet, here, the leprosy of shame!

CHARLES

(slowly comprehending)

Ha-ha! ho-ho! ha-ho! Did I not say
We should have mirth, my friends, . . . did I not?
I'll show you laughter now as rich as wine.

ANTONIO

But, sir, this is not well.

HAEMON

Bleat, Antonio,

And play the lamb, with your mock sympathy!

CHARLES

(still laughing)

He foots it, Fulvia, in the very tracks
Of your alarm, and wanders to delusion!
In the same tracks! No, no! do you not see?

HAEMON

Fiend! will you laugh at me? . . . Had I
Omnipotence a moment I would dash
Annihilation on you and your race.

(Strikes ANTONIO—drawing a cry from HELENA)

CHARLES

(changing)

Omnipotence? Why, not a greater power
Than it could make such a fool as you.
There must be two Gods in the world to do it.

HAEMON

(stabbing at HELENA wildly)

She shall not—!

ANTONIO

Hold, Haemon! Give me the knife!

(Struggles with him)

Let go of it, I say! . . . If you do not . . .

(Gets it and flings it away)

CHARLES

Was such an asp as this
Born of the same mother as this girl?
By Heaven—!

HELENA

Let me speak to him, sir.

CHARLES

And get blood on you—spattered with his venom?
I'll draw his fangs first. (To a GUARD) Lead him without,
Till he repents this fever . . . Then . . . (Looking around)

But how?

Why do you stare so, all of you, as if
You thought the skies would stop? Have I not
Had only friendly favors for this youth?

(After a silence)

Leave me. I had a thing to tell—but it
Must wait more seasonable festivity.

(To PAULA)

See to your mistress, girl. Antonio, stay.

(Waits till they go, then slowly leaves the throne)

ANTONIO

Father—

CHARLES

Did I not seek, even humbly,
To appease him?

ANTONIO

Sir, he—

CHARLES

Do I demand more

Than joy, a mere brevity of joy,
To bud upon my life's withering close?

ANTONIO

I do not see your meaning.

CHARLES

(darkly, inwardly) If it fails me,
If it should fail, because of him—or any—

ANTONIO

But, sir—

CHARLES

You are much like your mother, you.

ANTONIO

More in wanting your peace, sir, than in feature.

CHARLES

Then know that I have had a dream of peace,
A dream, Antonio . . . And to wake now
And learn . . . But . . . I will not look on that—
Nor on the abyss that lies under it.
You love me, boy?

ANTONIO

You cannot doubt it, sir.

I do—greatly.

CHARLES

(wearily) I have had darkness in me,
 Such night as would put out a heaven of hopes
 And sink me down under the world, to hit
 On nethermost despair.

ANTONIO

Forget it, sir.

For surely—

CHARLES

Had I drunk the last wave
 Of Lethe to the dregs, it would not
 Have stilled my desolation. So I turned
 My thwarted wants to iron, and the gladness
 I longed for to a cold and steely gloom.
 But now . . . I will no longer! For tonight
 A rift, a smile, a breath came—and changed
 My torture to an ecstasy!

ANTONIO

Sir—?

CHARLES

To

Such bliss as young Hyperion must have felt
 When driving the wild sun over the sky.

ANTONIO

And this bliss, sir, is—?

CHARLES

Such as none before

Has felt. But why are you pale?

ANTONIO

This bliss—?

CHARLES

Pale,
Like any weakling girl? What has happened?
The robbers wounded you?

ANTONIO

No . . . But this bliss
You speak of . . .

CHARLES

It is love, Antonio;
Or more than love!

ANTONIO

For whom?

CHARLES

For one fairer
Than any who ever entered a temple of Greece
In ancient days. Love that . . . But I see
You do not, or can not, share my rapture.
I will not ask it now—though its ardor
Has stayed the haunting tread of age in me
And brought youth burning back. Shall we go in?
(Takes his arm solicitously. They go)

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: The gardens of the castle. Paths meet at the centre where there is a cluster of low shrubs and a stone seat. The rear wall of the garden has a postern, and on a hill beyond is a convent. On the castle, or left, side is another seat, forward.

It is night of the same day and the moon is shining, but somewhat sadly. A nightingale sings.

Enter GIULIA, CECCO and NALDO.

GIULIA

That bird! always so vain and full of noise
And gushing! Sing, and sing sing sing, it must!
As if nobody else would speak or sleep.

CECCO

Let the bird be, my jaunty. Old tales tell
That shrew and nightingale were never friends.

GIULIA

No more were shrew and serpent!

CECCO

(smugly) Well, what would
You scratch from me?

GIULIA

If there is anything
To get from you at all, it must be scratched.

CECCO

Yet shrews do not scratch serpents!

GIULIA

When they catch them
Where they can neither coil nor strike?

CECCO

Well, I
Begin to coil, my sweet.

GIULIA

And I to scotch you
Ere it is done. Give me the postern key!

CECCO

Ha-ha! Ho-ho! Hee-hee! Your lady's voice;
But you are not your lady!

GIULIA

If I were
You'd be without a lord before tomorrow.
Give me the key, I say!

CECCO

Take care, I coil!

GIULIA

And I to stretch you out ere it's done.
Does the duke know you've slyly hidden from him
Antonio's passion—does he?

CECCO

(dashed) You have—?

GIULIA

Ha! . . .

And shall I tell him of it? He likes well
What's kept so thriftily!

CECCO

(beaten) You want the key
To let in Boro, whom he gave the sack,
To chuck your baby face and moon with you.

GIULIA

The duke might learn, too, you are not clear
Between his ducats and your own.

CECCO

(giving key) There then!

GIULIA

(laughing)
Yet shrews do not scratch serpents?—You may spy,
But others are not witless, I can tell you.

(To NALDO, with a letter, as CECCO goes)

Now, Naldo, do not lose the key or letter.
But should you, Boro must not come till *two*.
For Lord Antonio intends to meet
With . . . someone, here at twelve.

(NALDO goes through the postern; GIULIA to the castle)

(The nightingale sings again)

(HELENA enters with PAULA from the gardens)

HELENA

At twelve, he said, at twelve—beside the arbour?

PAULA

Yes, mistress.

HELENA

I could be patient if the moon
Would slip less sadly up. She is so pale
With longing for Endymion, her lover.

PAULA

Has she a lover? Oh, how strange, my lady.
Is it so sweet to love? Will men die for it,
And women, as it's said, weep themselves
Into the grave—yet gladly?

HELENA

(musingly) It is sweet
But fearful! For the edge of fate, Paula,
Cares not whom it shall sever.

PAULA

On my hills
They told of one who slew herself on her
Dead lover's breast. Would you do so, my lady,
If any one—?

HELENA

There is no twain in love.
My heart is in my Lord Antonio's
To beat or cease with it.

PAULA

Though he died far
Away from you?

HELENA

Far sunders flesh, not souls.
Across all lands the hush of death on him
Would sound to me; and did he live, denial,
Though God Himself should speak it with pity,
Would go unheeded . . . But he is near!

PAULA

Ah, no,

Not yet, surely.

HELENA

Then some weariness
Has pluckt the minutes' wings and they have crept.

PAULA

It is not twelve—else we would hear the band
Of holy Basil chanting from the hill.
(Points to the convent)

HELENA

(rising)

Nay, hearts may hear beyond the hark of ears.
His step thrills through the earth—into my breast!

(The postern opens)

Go, Paula, for it is he! But do not sleep
Until I come.

PAULA

(going)

No, lady, I'll say *aves*.

(ANTONIO enters softly and comes down)

HELENA

Antonio! I live again and breathe,
Now that I know betiding has not fallen
To keep you from me.

ANTONIO

Stronger than all betiding
This hour has reached and drawn me yearning to you!
(Takes her in his arms)

HELENA

Will all hours do so—always?

ANTONIO

In all worlds!

For evil fates at least can never grasp
Beyond the grave.

HELENA

You put it sadly, saying

"Beyond."

ANTONIO

Sadly and loathly! But, beloved—

HELENA

I would not die and leave the happy sun,
Or sink from the moon's peace into a tomb!
What dirging have you heard to mind you of it?

ANTONIO

Love is a bliss too bright to dwell on earth.
God should give us the power to mount with it
Above mortality.

HELENA

And above fear,
Whose burden I now see within your eyes
But dare not take as yet into my own?
(Sitting down)

Let us look on the moon a while first,
A little while longer, forgetfully.

ANTONIO

(by her after a pause)
These little hands—this hair—!

HELENA

Like a farewell

Your touch falls on them.

ANTONIO

To a father yield them?

HELENA

(startled)
A—father?

ANTONIO

No, ah no! It cannot be.

HELENA

What cannot be? Your dread stammers strangely.
You do not mean that he—?

ANTONIO

No, my Helena,

He must not, ever!

HELENA

But, you mean—? . . . Surely
You would not let him touch me, even in thought?
Come nearer to me than a father may?

ANTONIO

Your beauty has swept him like a spell, or like
The sudden swift attack of a contagion.

HELENA

Yet why? I only smiled at him, pleading;
But smiled!

ANTONIO

He had forgotten that such smiles
Could dawn in a cold world; and now is aflame
To take your tenderness into his arms
And hear the warm sweet music of your heart.
It saddens me. I could suffer for him,
If need were, as deeply as Prometheus
On Caucasus, but not—

HELENA

We must fly then!
In flight alone there's safety for our bliss.

ANTONIO

And famishing for him, if this last hope
Is snapped away now—if from the light
We push him back to darkness.

HELENA

He is your father,
And I, cruelly orphaned, have had none,

Though often, in my need, I have sought
To fancy every wind's caress a father's
Or every tree's touch in the deep wood.
But if you cannot temper his dark mood,
As hitherto you have, what will befall?
His anger and revenge are unsparing.

ANTONIO

Yet we must wait!

HELENA

And by it goad the speed
Of peril doubly toward us?

ANTONIO

Should it draw
Too desperately near, I will fling
All pity and birth from me—and keep only
A fierceness for your peace!

HELENA

My Anthony!

ANTONIO

A fierceness never to falter!

HELENA

I am yours;
More yours than immortality is God's!
(As he clasps her)

Do you not hear the nightingale say it,
The trembling stars sigh it, and the moon
Murmur it soothingly into your eyes?

ANTONIO

Ah, sorceress! you need but breathe to put
Abysm from us! but build words, to float us
On ecstasy.

HELENA

Where all your myriad kisses
Sing in me!

ANTONIO

Echoing sweetly from my heart
Music your beauty makes amid its strings.

HELENA

Then would I lean forever at your lips,
Lose no reverberance, no ring, no waft,
Hear nothing everlastingly but them!
(A slow mournful chant drifts down from the convent. They unclasp
and listen sadly)

ANTONIO

Weary with vigil does it swell and sink,
Moaning the dead.

HELENA

Ah no! . . . there are no dead
Tonight in all the world! Could God see any
Lie cold and icy still, while we are rich
In warmth and throb?

ANTONIO

Yet, hear. The funeral tread
Of the old sea sighs in each strain and breaks.

HELENA

(her head fallen back on his arm)
As if I had long been drowned I hear it over me.
As if . . . long . . . drowned . . . and forgotten.

ANTONIO

(touching her face)
Helena! you are cold! Your lips are still
And trance-laden! Your spirit is not in you,
But somewhere afar! . . .

HELENA

A vision sweeps me
Away from you . . . Oh!

ANTONIO

(shaking her) Awake from it.

HELENA

I sank into a waste of waves that beat
 Against a cliff, and beat. Then you, it seemed,
 Were with me there.

ANTONIO

(rising) Let us go to the arbour.
 The moon has looked too long on the sad earth
 And can reflect but sorrow.

HELENA

(shivering) I fear. I fear.
 (They go, clinging together. Again the nightingale)
 (Enter CHARLES, worn; CECCO with him)

CHARLES

And yet it is a little thing to sleep—
 Just to lie down and sleep. A child can do it.

CECCO

If my lord would, here's sleep for him wrapped in
 A quiet powder.

CHARLES

No. Sleep is the mate
 Of peace—and should go with it. I have slept
 In the wild arms of battle while the winds
 Of souls departing seemed to shudder by,
 Or on the breast of dizzy danger cradled
 Have found a lull. Potions should be for those
 Who wrestle and are thrown by misery.

CECCO

And are you now at peace, sir?

CHARLES

Strangely; and yet
 For sleep too coldly calm.

CECCO

So you were, sir,

Or so at least you seemed, I remember,
 The night young Haemon's father found his prison
 Too . . . costly.

CHARLES

(darkly) As you, knave, shall find one
 If ever again you—

CECCO

Pardon!

CHARLES

A grave sealed

Is one-forgotten. . . . And yet, was it so?
 That night indeed?

CECCO

The same, sir.

CHARLES

(musingly) And the moon
 Hung on the east stainless, even as now?

CECCO

A half one, even as now.

CHARLES

Since that hour's close

Till this I have not stood in so much calm.
 And yet he was a traitor—every breath
 And vein of him! A Greek who . . . I'll not say it;
 For *she* is Greek too. So I'll forget
 The word is rankly odorous of perfidy.

CECCO

My lord thinks—of the lady Helena?

CHARLES

And if I do?

CECCO

Why, sir—

CHARLES

What if I do?

CECCO

Naught, sir. I only meant—

CHARLES

Like all your hints

This too is bulging with some theft of spial.

I've hands to disgorge it if you cannot.

(Threatens to choke him)

CECCO

It was of Lord Antonio!

CHARLES

Speak, then.

CECCO

Is he not strange of late, and moody?

CHARLES

How?

CECCO

Upon his back in the woods, as if he listened

To wistful balladry. Then riding wild,

No whither and alone. Or yearning about

The castle, without arms or any intent.

He'll drink, sir, and not know if it be wine!

CHARLES

He is so. Yet this morning he unsheathed

His skill, with bravery.

CECCO

And did not ask

A boon for it?

CHARLES

The question puts my thought
 To granting one. His aspiration flags,
 Perhaps needing new wings and buoyancy.
 I'll make him lord of Arta, total lord,
 In his own right—since my trust is ripe.

CECCO

He begs no softer boon?

CHARLES

Sleekly still

Your questions point to sleeker consequences!

CECCO

Sir, no. I would but say that Antonio—

CHARLES

Worm, you began so. Stretch now to the end.

CECCO

I would but say, and hope no thorny thought
 Is in it to vex you . . . May he not be
 Amorous, mellow sick, upon some maid?

CHARLES

By heaven and earth and all their pregnancy,
 Have you so labored to this atom's birth?
 I had supposed that some Titanic woe
 Or doom was ready to fall upon and crush me.
 Or, if not that calamity, at least
 That he has been a traitor to my throne
 Or plotted with some secret cruelty
 To blight . . . a certain tenderness that lately . . .
 But, what was that?

(A sound at the postern startles him. The gate softly opens and
 HAEMON enters)

CHARLES

(amazed)

Keys, you, to this? . . . keys and a guilty stealth?

HAEMON

(confounded)

I have excuse, sir.

CHARLES

And a better, doubtless,

To what lies in my vaults and treasures,

My secrecies of rubies and rich gold?

(CECCO slinks off)

HAEMON

Not you nor any, my lord, shall mistake me!

I'm here only—

CHARLES

For what, then, if not?

You come at midnight—a most honest hour!

Enter my postern—a most honest way!

And seem most honest—so, indeed, how could I?

HAEMON

You wrong me—as you ever have! I come

Only to loose my sister.

CHARLES

As today

You would, with a swift stab, into death?

HAEMON

Rather Antonio, could I reach him with it!

Yet now, neither. For since I find you here,

My passion melts to a plea.

CHARLES

For her to leave

My care? that fever still?

HAEMON

(burningly)

Am I to stand

As stone while soiling flames leap out at her

And singe her with insufferable shame?

Am I to let her innocence and joy
 Be drained as virgin freshness from the dawn? . . .
 Though he were ten Antonios and a god,
 I would not!

CHARLES

(staring) Ten Antonios? Are you
 So bitter against me that upon him too
 You pour—

HAEMON

Is there no other reason to?

CHARLES

No. He is my son. Yet if you have
 Some cause or reason to—such cause as men
 Should have when suspicions curve their lips . . .
 I say if you . . . No. . . . He is my son,
 And has such memories as would cry out
 And curdle him if—

HAEMON

(scornfully) Agh!

CHARLES

(very slowly) What reason, then?
 (A Voice, PAULA'S, is heard in fear, approaching)

PAULA

(entering hurriedly)
 My lady! . . . Lord Antonio! . . . My lady?
 (Sees CHARLES and stops in terror)

CHARLES

(strainedly)
 Come here.

PAULA

Oh, sir!

CHARLES

(Takes her wrist) Why were you in a haste?

PAULA

(sinking down)

Please, sir, I do not know.

CHARLES

Then why do you

Drop cringing to your knees?

PAULA

Sir, it is late!

My mistress—

CHARLES

Keeps temptation in her eyes

And hair, does she not? A shy mole, too,

Lies pillowed on the softness of her cheek.

Does she rest well?

PAULA

My lord—

CHARLES

Not—too well?

But sometimes walks asleep? And you have come

To fetch her?

PAULA

Loose me, sir! Your eyes—

CHARLES

Are like

Some other, perhaps? Antonio's, say, or—?

PAULA

Sir!

CHARLES

(lifting her head roughly)

Perhaps he too walks in his sleep. Were it

Quite well if they have met—these two that walk?

PAULA

(more terrified)

My lady! Oh, sir, do not—

CHARLES

(casting her off)

Get within!

For she may still lie wonderful upon
 Her couch—with arms dropt whitely . . . Go and pray;
 For something now may chance—we cannot know.

(As she goes)

Something beyond knowing—if a mere child,
 Serving about a mistress with such hair,
 Has might—almost too much.

HAEMON

Sir, upon whom?

CHARLES

Be still.

HAEMON

Upon Antonio?

CHARLES

(his rage rising)

Can I not think
 'Helena' but you link 'Antonio' to it?
 Can their two names not be—yet be apart?
 Or if they can, must each echo the other
 Whenever . . . ? . . . This is futile froth and fume.—
 The very foam of folly. You are thick
 In falsity—but shall not thicken me.
 Another ardor rules Antonio's eye,
 Not Helena.

HAEMON

Yet she is bidden here

Into his arms?

CHARLES

(aflame) To mine is she bidden!

To mine, mole, who burrow under a pall
 Of muddy misbelief! to mine—no other!
 And did a seraph out of Paradise
 Seek now to prevent it, I would . . . Look:
 I'll speak calmly of her . . . as calmly

As he who woke upon a threshing floor
With Ruth fair at his feet. I have gleaned long
And lonely amid the years, long and lonely;
But she, now, shall glean beside me, softly,
Till sunset fails in me—and I am night.

HAEMON

(stunned)

This is a net! a gin, a lie to snare me,
To trick me—!

CHARLES

Fool! Who needs a gin or lie
To snare what never has been truly free?

HAEMON

This tenderness that you profess for her
Is false or foul!

CHARLES

Yet you live still to say it?

HAEMON

What of Antonio then—and *his* desire?
Is it not treachery?

CHARLES

Antonio?

HAEMON

Does nothing lie betwixt *him* and Helena?

CHARLES

I said once . . .

HAEMON

Her maid Paula came here
A moment since and stammered. For what reason?

CHARLES

She only . . . she but sought . . . She . . . go on!

HAEMON

And why have I crept here at a strange hour,
In a strange way?

CHARLES

You pause upon my patience
To parch it. Go on.

HAEMON

Then hear the whole
Of what was hid from you so cunningly.
A little since I found beside the road
A boy, lying senseless,
Under the tread of some too reckless hoof.
He held this key and writing that avers
In lines of clandestine import
That your Antonio and Helena
Would meet under these trees tonight at twelve.
(A deathly pause)

CHARLES

That leans toward a final desolation.
Go in and call me Fulvia.

HAEMON

She is aware
And aids in this deceit—so is trustless.
This writing says it of her.

CHARLES

Fulvia?
She too? . . . No, not she? . . . Yet I remember
Her sudden whispers to him when . . . But, no!
I'll not let such a belief fix its fangs
Upon me without question . . . Yet against
My hope she set a coldness and a doubt!
(After a pause, starting up)
But,—where is he?

HAEMON

Antonio? You at last
Can be aroused, then?

CHARLES

At twelve with her?

At twelve under these trees, you say?

HAEMON

Tonight.

CHARLES

Yet might it not be that they are meeting

For some other intent?

HAEMON

In such a way?

CHARLES

(convinced)

If it is so, he is not flesh of me.

A traitor is no son, nor was, nor shall be;

Whatever in me pleads for him then shall not

Be listened to—

HAEMON

It should not, sir.

CHARLES

For weakness

Is never wisdom—though it be for love.

And I remember, too, that today

He kept the guilty secret coldly in him

Even as I let fatuous words fall.

'A rift,' I said, 'a smile, a breath has come,

To lift me from the depth' . . . Such depths as he

Himself shall sink into.

For false—and all false—and ever false

Is he who's so when most he should be true.

I'll make his treachery bitter to all times,

To future generations and all sons.

Search every shade where he could hide with her.

I shall be famine till I hear his groans.

(They go, in opposite directions, swords drawn. FULVIA enters distressed with GIULIA)

He was with Haemon?

FULVIA

GIULIA
On that seat.

Yet passionless?

FULVIA
Angry,

GIULIA
Except his eyes.

You not asleep?

FULVIA
Why were

GIULIA
I—

Quite still as he said it?

FULVIA
Did he move—or stand

GIULIA
I was behind—

FULVIA
And could not see? But heard Cecco name them?
And both are still without?

GIULIA
Yes, for Paula—

FULVIA
Then Haemon, with a key, entered softly?
With what key? what? . . . But that can wait
Go first and learn where the duke is. Quickly!

(Words are heard—from the direction CHARLES took. Then clashing swords and a woman's restraining cry. CHARLES then rushes in, wounded and furious. ANTONIO follows dazed, then HELENA. From the castle side, HAEMON, CECCO and many)

ANTONIO

Father! I did not know you—so swiftly
You fell upon me.

CHARLES

(To a GUARD) Gaping, ghastly fool,
Seize him!

ANTONIO

But, sir—!

CHARLES

Do not let him fawn
About me—after laying murderous hands
Upon me! . . . Until God forgives Hell
I'll not forgive him.

HELENA

But, sir, he—

CHARLES

Is perfidy!

So do not touch me with your voice or being,
That caused me in my folly to believe . . .
There's sweetness in a flower, light in air,
And beauty, that is innocent, on earth.

(As ANTONIO is seized)

Bind him and over the cliff have him flung,
Justly over—as traitors are ever—
On the supportless wind.

FULVIA

You cannot do this!

No, Charles! Though your looks heave hate at me,
I tell you it would be—

CHARLES

(waving her off) You . . . are dead
And speak to me. Once you were Fulvia,
A trusted friend . . . but now only a ghost

Whom I must gaze upon regretlessly.

(To the GUARD)

At sunset—tomorrow—let it be!

(ANTONIO is led off)

HELENA

(kneeling)

Oh, sir, he is your son, and loves you much.

Surely you will not!

CHARLES

(to HAEMON)

Lead her away quickly

If you would still have her . . . Lead her away!

(HAEMON at once does so)

FULVIA

(more urgently)

While I have breath, Charles, I will oppose this.

CHARLES

You are a ghost I look upon, no friend.

(Clutching his wound)

For I am quite friendless now . . . quite.

(Faints)

FULVIA

No, no, Charles! (Down by him) Hear me! . . . Hear me!

(Then, after a pause)

Already a numbness bars me from his breast.

(Rising)

Bear him within, to a physician, quickly.

(Several GUARDS lift him up carefully. FULVIA follows. The rest watch silently)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE: The audience hall of Act II, but destitute of vines, flowers and all former semblance of festivity. Through the large open windows the approach of sunset casts a seemingly sinister light over fields of citron and

olive. The ducal chair and one or two other pieces of furniture are out of place.

Enter the CAPTAIN of the guard and a SOLDIER, who pause, talking low.

SOLDIER

There is no more then?

CAPTAIN

Not if you understand.

SOLDIER

That I do—all of it! I've served
Under the bold de Montreal; and he,
For stratagems—well Italy knows him!

CAPTAIN

You must be quick and secret.

SOLDIER

As the end

Of the world!

CAPTAIN

We are the duke's—but our love
In this is with Antonio.

SOLDIER

All of it!

CAPTAIN

Remember then that none of the duke's guard
You fall on must escape, and none be wounded.
The princess Fulvia has promised us
Good chinking pay with this, and her thanks.

SOLDIER

Madonna save her! The Judas of a father
Who robs her rest!

CAPTAIN

(listening) Be off then, and station
Your men, but do not fail.

SOLDIER

If I do,

Bury me with a Jew and next a Turk!

(Goes)

(FULVIA enters. The CAPTAIN stands at attention)

FULVIA

Our plans grow to fulfillment? Are in no way
Misplanted?

CAPTAIN

All seems seasonable now
For their expected fruit. The duke himself,
When once again he is himself, princess,
Will bless us for the boldness of this deed.

FULVIA

It may be. It may . . . For though he's quick,
He's quicker in forgetting. I will seek
To move him to it.

CAPTAIN

The kind and wise assaults
Of your attempt must move him, gracious lady.
What further command have you?

FULVIA

Only this:

(HAEMON enters abruptly)

(FULVIA dismisses the CAPTAIN)

HAEMON

I seek the duke.

FULVIA

You would seek penitence—

Were you less far in folly.

HAEMON

Is he not here?

If not—

FULVIA

Regret, too, would strain your lips,

Not this defiance.

HAEMON

Pardon. I was told

That he would—

FULVIA

Was it so easy to overwhelm

Your sister under the ruins of her dreams?

HAEMON

Better beneath her dreams than under shame!

FULVIA

Your rashness cloaks itself in that excuse,

Your folly, that has doomed Antonio,

Though innocent, to death.

HAEMON

Pah! he betrayed her,

Or meant to!

FULVIA

Only your fierce hate of him

Avows so; no true voice of faith in you.

HAEMON

The murdered words of my dead father vow it.

They haunt this castle's cruel walls, where he

Was prisoned. And the dead speak not to lie.

FULVIA

But to admonish do! So in vain

You spur and brave yourself with that belief.

HAEMON

(moved)

What do you want of me?

FULVIA

First to warn you

That like a wolf remorse already has fixed
Its fangs upon the quarry of your conscience.

HAEMON

(bitter again)

He lured her to him, I say—under night
And secrecy!

FULVIA

Not running there will you
Escape its dread pursuit.

HAEMON

His own father

Was duped, too, by him!

FULVIA

But one refuge

Have you against its unrelenting tooth—
And that above the slough of self-deceit.

HAEMON

(moved again)

No refuge can be from an hour that's gone!
Who can reverse the dial or tilt the glass
And bring it back?

FULVIA

But if you could?

HAEMON

Where is

The duke? This is baubling.

FULVIA

If you could?

HAEMON

I will not stand here listening to the worm
You set to feed upon me. With the sunset
Antonio—must pay.

FULVIA

There yet is time.

HAEMON

The duke is fixed.

FULVIA

And I the more firmly

To lean against the power of his purpose.

HAEMON

(wavering)

You have a plan?

FULVIA

One that is sure—and kind.

If you would help to stay this disaster,

Go and join the captain of the guard.

The duke will come here, away from the sea,

To watch the sun, I think; and then— But go.

(HAEMON obeys quickly. A bugle blows. FULVIA turns to a window and looks out)

(CHARLES enters, worn, gray, disheveled. CECCO follows at heel)

FULVIA

(as he sees her)

I come to plead, my lord.

CHARLES

Nature had better

Have pled with her, your mother, against conception.

(Goes to his chair)

FULVIA

Your trust in me is unreasonably

Withdrawn—yet for a moment still I beg it.

CHARLES

A moment were too much, or not enough.

Trust is a flower of gradual birth—that does

Not bloom at a command.

FULVIA

I would it did!

Or that it bloomed like amaranth in those
We love, beyond all drouth and withering.

CHARLES

I'm weary of words. Leave them.

FULVIA

Will you not turn

Out of this rage?

CHARLES

I would not have you drawn
Still farther down the vortex of this destiny.
Enough, then.

FULVIA

There's time for you yourself
To draw back from it.

CHARLES

Myself am but a hulk—
Whose treasures have already been engulfed;
Though none of you—not she, you, nor he,
Antonio, was truly mine; none of you.

FULVIA

It is your fury, not your reason, that
Distorts us into guilt. For though Antonio
Rebelled, and would not crush his heart, but flung
You stormy and unfilial refusal,
He still is—

CHARLES

Leave, I say!

FULVIA

Until your anger
And will are utterly wasted, I can not.

CHARLES

(turning away)

Cecco, the hour?

CECCO

It leans, my lord, to sunset.

CHARLES

The sky—?

CECCO

Only a murk of cloud moves up.

(FULVIA, ignored, goes)

CHARLES

(disorderedly)

There should be storm—gloat of wind and grind
Of hopeless thunders. Lightnings should leap out
Like tongues of fiends . . . There should be bitter storm.

(His head falls low)

And yet—!

CECCO

My lord?

CHARLES

The glow and glory of her

Seem dead in me.

CECCO

Sir, of the Greek? whom you—?

CHARLES

And yearning for her seems an ash of folly,
A left and quickly quenched desire of youth
Kindled in me.

CECCO

Then dare I say that now

Antonio has—

CHARLES

Cease! The mere breath

That sounds his name arouses me again
To irresistible frenzy—though the silence
In which it hangs unuttered aches as sorely.

(As CECCO shrinks back)

Where is the sun?

CECCO

(at the window) Only a space now

Above the sea's surge. And now it hangs,
Ready to dip.

CHARLES

(starting up) Fulvia! Yesterday

You said to me,—did you not?—that though
They quailed with fear, they would not flee and leave me
To desolation thus?

CECCO

She is not here, sir.

CHARLES

Bitten by hounds of fury and despair,
Have I indeed doomed you, Antonio,
Because a last dream of youth obsessed me
With beauty? . . . Boy, I feel your baby arms
About me again; and all your burgeoning,
Ere cruel years grew in me, comes back,
On wings and stealing winds of memory.

CECCO

Oh, then, sir, will you not—?

CHARLES

Yes! . . . Go out

And stay the guard! . . . He must not sink down
Under the awful fathoms of the foam.

(Changing)

And yet . . . did he not cast me, his father,

From bliss, from immeasurable peaks of it?
And have I not sunk cruelly down,
Forever so, under hope's horizon?

CECCO

This your despair, my lord, would move him more
Than death. Forget the girl.

CHARLES

Until she came

My gloomy pulse beat with a rightful scorn
Against the ills that sieged it. Stony was
Its solitude, bastioned against
All danger of quick blisses . . . Then with craving
For that mute tenderness, which women's love
Lays on the desolation of the world,
She ravished it!

CECCO

But, sir, not knowingly.

She thought of you only—

CHARLES

A woman's smile

Never was luring, never, but she knew it,
As hawk the cruel rapture of his wings.

CECCO

But she is young and youth—

CHARLES

Not only the old

Should pay deception's price . . . Where is the sun?

CECCO

(again at the window)

Upon a cloud through which it sinks tonight.

CHARLES

So low is it? . . . so low? Only a moment
And then Antonio—?

CECCO

A darker cloud

Withholds it still; but now—

CHARLES

Ah, no!

CECCO

It dips!

CHARLES

(up—frenziedly)

Great Christ, will You indeed let it be?

Is there no power or miracle to stay it—

If he is innocent?

CECCO

(awed) It sinks, my lord.

CHARLES

(closing his eyes)

As in a vision I am there and see it!

He's lifted and flung over. And now the rocks

Await him . . . and the jagged swirling foam . . .

(He sinks back shuddering)

(CECCO seeing him thus pours out wine)

(A SOLDIER enters breathless)

SOLDIER

Great lord—!

CHARLES

(dazedly) Who and whence are you? Be gone.

SOLDIER

There's mutiny; revolt, sir, rebellion!

Some of your guard, upon the cliff have risen

Against your orders.

CHARLES

The ranks of Hell have risen

And roar up at me.

SOLDIER

(confused) Sir, no; only a few—
A few hidden there.

CHARLES

The skies roar too,
Else they are dead and cannot. Every throat
Of earth and realms unearthly rages at me.

(As the SOLDIER stares)

You doubt it? . . . If you do, look in my eyes.
Are they not pale with murder bitterly done?

SOLDIER

Sir . . . no.

CHARLES

Yet I have killed with them—spoken
Death . . . not unreasonably, yet death.
And Hell has heard and echoes it cryingly
With a wild spirit clamor that plows through me
Like storms of pain. Go. I've mutinies in me
To make mutinies welcome—to call chaos
And infinite ruin fair. (As the SOLDIER goes)

Yet I will not.

I will not . . . yet. (To CECCO) My robes and coronet—
Fetch them! I will sit in them and mock
At greatness that a passion may unthrone.
For if we do not weep at our misfortunes,
Calamity will cease to torture us,
And fate, for want of tears, will thirst to death.

(CECCO goes)

(JULIAN enters incensed)

JULIAN

Infuriate man!

CHARLES

Speak so, scion of Rome.

I lust for bitterness.

JULIAN

What have you done!

CHARLES

Watched the sun's setting. Did it not
Bloody the waves finely?

JULIAN

Horror! . . . Horrible

It is, when a father slays and smiles!

CHARLES

Not so, lord Cardinal; but only when
He slays and does not smile.

JULIAN

This passes mercy!

CHARLES

And peace. Yet I say that at the trite
Enchantments of this earth men should not smile,
But only when there's no more hope of them.
Smiles should be kept for life's unbearable.

JULIAN

(invoking heaven)

Murderer!

CHARLES

. . . Yes . . .

JULIAN

Heretic . . . !

CHARLES

That too.

(Goes to the shrine and casts it out of the window)

JULIAN

Fool, fool!

CHARLES

There are no wise men, lord Cardinal,
On earth—or above it.

JULIAN

Stone! thou stone!

Antonio's death under the sea should raise
Each wave of it against you—and flood you
To penitence! Every memory of him
Should sting you with wild guilt!

CHARLES

(nodding) You have loosed
Your robe, lord prelate, see . . . Yet, have peace:
A more terrible cry swells up in me
Than frenzy can invoke—a vaster pain
Than any but Omnipotence can raise.

JULIAN

My lips shall learn it!

CHARLES

(inwardly) "Father!" it moans, "Father!"
It is my ears' inheritance forever.
(FULVIA enters, and comes down firmly to JULIAN)

FULVIA

One of your suite, my lord, has been struck
And wounded in a quarrel mortally.
Attend and give him absolution—then,
If it is still your wish, I may ask of you
Escort to Rome.

JULIAN

(amazed) I do not understand.

CHARLES

To Rome? . . . You?

JULIAN

With me?

FULVIA

Do not pause here

On the dear minutes of a dying man.

CHARLES

(as JULIAN goes, and she turns)

I am bewildered too, as he is,

By this decision's strangeness.

FULVIA

(sitting)

For ten years

You've held a shelter over me, my lord;

Ten warm, friendly, peaceful, happy years,

Whose every moment else had been a torture.

CHARLES

Then why do you—?

FULVIA

No corner in these walls

Where we have walked and talked shall be forgotten

When I am gone; no niche where we have sat

After the chase, or battle's tired return,

And quietly breathed the deep hours away

In rest and sympathy.

CHARLES

And yet you go?

FULVIA

If so I must. For though we have been friends,

And might have been to the end, or beyond,

You changed last night.

CHARLES

(remembering) I—?

FULVIA

As the sea does

Under the wind's frenzy, leaving me—

CHARLES

(torn)

I had forgot! The sun—the sea—the cliff—
The rocks—the funeral fury of the foam.
Antonio—!

FULVIA

Be calm.

CHARLES

There yet is time!

I'll send the fleetest runner to outspeed
His doom, and if he does, I'll rain upon him
A golden shower of ducats!

FULVIA

(rising)

But what if

There were no need of that now, my lord?

CHARLES

No need of it . . . now? You mean no need
Because the sun already has gone down
Beyond recall into the night?

FULVIA

No, but

Because he—Antonio—

CHARLES

In your mien

There's something . . . What is it? . . . that portends
He is not irremediably gone.

FULVIA

(gazing before her)

He was a child in mimic mail clad out
When first I crossed this threshold.

CHARLES

It is so.

FULVIA

And I, a woman distressed, loved him then.

CHARLES

As now! And yet you do not look at me
As at an executioner.

FULVIA

If I do not—

CHARLES

(trembling)

What is this "if"—if it is anything?—
I say you shall not go.

FULVIA

Then I must ask

Whether you'd have him back, if you could.

CHARLES

Back . . . ?

FULVIA

Through those curtains, say, or through—?

CHARLES

You do not speak reasonably, but lead—
You lead me trembling from reality,
Knowing that he is kept—by darker curtains.

FULVIA

Yet if you could?

CHARLES

A more than meaning breaks
From you and as a resurrection stirs.
What is it? I wait unbearably.

FULVIA

(sitting again)

A soldier hurried here a little since
To tell you of a revolt.

CHARLES

He came breathless.

FULVIA

It was a mutiny raised at my command—
To spare you the mad blot of a son's blood.

CHARLES

Antonio then, is not—?

FULVIA

(rising)

No! He lives!

He was not cast over!

CHARLES

(overwhelmed)

If this be true—

If you have done this, for me—and him,
Have fearlessly withheld the shears of fate
From closing in upon him—

FULVIA

Your despair

Alone was my deepest fear.

CHARLES

(profoundly moved)

Then from

This hour no gratitude or deed of mine,
No gift, no glow, no worth can ever repay you—
And words, had I the richest, would seem poorest.
But where is he? Belief, though it has risen
From death in me, still stands in strong cerements
That seeing alone can break.

FULVIA

Then turn and see.

(ANTONIO comes from the curtains)

CHARLES

(with arms out)

Boy! . . . my Antonio! . . .

ANTONIO

(as they embrace) . . . Father!
(JULIAN enters hurriedly to FULVIA)

JULIAN

If your decision and desire, princess,
Are still to go with me to Rome, a ship—
(Breaks off, seeing ANTONIO)

FULVIA

You look on flesh and blood, lord Cardinal.
It is indeed Antonio with us.
(A sudden cry and weeping is heard within)

CHARLES

(as it continues)
Whose cry is that? It's strange and hurts me strangely.

CECCO

(entering)
My lord, the little wench, Paula, who tends
Upon the Lady Helena . . . Antonio!
(Stares at him)

ANTONIO

What of her? Is it she who is weeping?
Do not stand there agulp and agape at me.
There are worse things than risen dead to fear.

CECCO

She says the Lady Helena—

ANTONIO

(fiercely anxious) Well, what?
Has some bird or flower turned asp to bite her?
Has earth suddenly opened to engulf her?
Or has—?

CECCO

She asks to come to the duke.

ANTONIO

Then fetch her.

FULVIA

(as CECCO goes)

There's no need to fear, Antonio—now.
She will but tell of some grief of Helena's,
Some broken-hearted tears, which your safety
Will dry in her, when she has learned of it.

ANTONIO

These hours are ill and are infected with
Resolved adversity!

FULVIA

To one who has stood

So recently under doom, it but seems so.

(CECCO leading PAULA still tearful reenters)

ANTONIO

(before PAULA sees him)

Paula, your mistress—

PAULA

(staring at him)

Oh, Lord Jesus! Oh . . . !

ANTONIO

I am no ghost. Look on me and see.

I have not been in the grave, even a moment

Down under the sea. Where is your mistress?

PAULA

(hysterical)

O, sir.

Go to her then! Go to her!

ANTONIO

But where is she?

PAULA

She moaned all day and wept, thinking of you!

But when at last the sun was sinking—

ANTONIO

Yes?

PAULA

She came and kissed me gently—oh so gently,
Then took her jewels off and gave them to me . . .

ANTONIO

And then—?

PAULA

She went out into the night alone.

CHARLES

(starting)

Where? Along what path?

PAULA

I do not know!

But last night she said to me, sadly,
"My heart is in my lord Antonio's,
To beat or cease with it." I learned her words,
They seemed so pretty. I meant in learning them
To tell them to a lover when I have one.

CHARLES

(pale)

Merciless God! what if she has—?

FULVIA

(seeing his fear)

Charles!

CHARLES

What—if she has followed him to the cliff?

FULVIA

And over it?

ANTONIO

Over it? Over the cliff? Over—?

(Utterly stricken, he rushes from the hall)

CHARLES

(to CECCO)

Go out after him, and learn quickly
What has befallen. Quickly!

PAULA

(again hysterically) Oh, my lady!

CHARLES

Be silent, girl. I cannot bear your voice
Upon my heart. No sure, certain mishap
That's irretrievable has yet befallen.

(He moves toward his chair and slumps into it)

(BARDAS, heard without, enters backward. ANTONIO at whom
he stares, is pressing him)

ANTONIO

Where is she?

BARDAS

You, here? . . . safe and alive?
Not dead and under the sea?

ANTONIO

Where is Helena?

Is she too not safe and alive?

BARDAS

(bitterly)

Safe?

Oh quite, quite! . . . Quite!—if she had shrift!

ANTONIO

The dead are so. But she is not. Do you—?

BARDAS

She came to the cliff, witless and in tears,
Her being fused into a single want—
To follow you over it.

ANTONIO

But—you stayed her?

You held her back?

BARDAS

Yes.

ANTONIO

Oh then, go on.

BARDAS

She had a phial—in her dress—

ANTONIO

Poison?

BARDAS

She drew it out and sought to drink of it.

ANTONIO

But did not? You dashed it from her?

BARDAS

Over

The cliff. And supposed the peril passed,
For she began to plead, piteously:

"Can I not even go the way of death,
The cold way Antonio went, and clasp him
And drift with him out of the bitter world,
To some uninhabited ocean isle
God has forgot?"

ANTONIO

You held her fast, though,

And calmed her?

BARDAS

Until revelers came

And jested her with taking a new lover.
Then suddenly she broke out of my grasp,
Swifter than all prevention.

ANTONIO

And leapt over,

In spite of all? Oh, my Helena!
(His voice breaking)

My Helena! . . . Has all your loveliness
Fared but to this!

BARDAS

I saw her leap down

In a wild anguish—and until I die
Shall see no more.

ANTONIO

(violently) Till then, and forever,
The sick vision of it should not cease
To haunt you with shame and with remorse!
(Again rushes out of the hall)

PAULA

(once more hysterically)
Let me go to my lady! . . . let me go!

CHARLES

Still her! Staunch the tears of this girl,
The fluttering cries. For they press the air
With aching, unendurable agony.

PAULA

(quite witlessly)
I know, my lady! I understand your words—
The song you sang today to ease your heart.
I know the words of it. I remember them.
(Sings)

Sappho! Sappho!
In maiden woe,
(*Let alone love, it spurns and burns!*)
Wept, wept and leapt—
Oh love is so!
(*Let alone love, it burns!*)

My lady! my sweet lady! I remember!
(She is led out)

FULVIA

This is cruelly sad and pitiful!

CHARLES

I cannot bear her voice upon my heart.

(AGABUS enters. Startled anew, all stare)

CHARLES

What now, dog of Death? Do you—?

AGABUS

(searching)

The Shadow—

He came here . . . the king of corruption,

Of all the world's corruption.

CHARLES

Monk—!

AGABUS

(nodding)

Yes, yes,

I have not forgotten—you are a lover.

But one of them already has leapt down

Into the Pit—from Christ into the Pit.

And now the other will!

CHARLES

(with abhorrence)

Take him away!

AGABUS

The Devil's nine wits are too many for us.

(Wanders a moment, then goes)

FULVIA

(as CHARLES stares, rigid)

The other over, too? . . . It cannot be!

Do not look so, Charles—It is but madness

He speaks. O, do not! Surely, Antonio—

(Armor is heard clanking. The SOLDIER reenters hurriedly)

SOLDIER

(kneeling)

Oh, sir, my lord duke!

CHARLES

(very slowly) . . . Rise—and go.

You have no news. There's no news in the world,
 Or if there were there's no tongue to say it.
 Go pray.

SOLDIER

But, sir—!

CHARLES

You have no tidings, fool.

But now have only come here to tell me
 What silence groans and grinds in its mill,
 What earth, though it is numb and dead, raves:
 To tell me . . . Antonio has gone out
 And leapt over a precipice . . . for love.
 That is no tidings. It has been fixed on me
 For ever. It is older than God is—

(HAEMON enters alarmed)

As old as pain.

HAEMON

My sister—?

CHARLES

(slowly)

Yes, your sister;

And with her . . . my son.

HAEMON

Where are they, sir?

JULIAN

(as CHARLES stares vacantly)

Do not hold him in this anguish longer!

FULVIA

Haemon . . . they have left us to our tears.

CHARLES

(trancedly)

Let no one groan. I say let no one groan.
 For now if any should groan—

FULVIA

(going to him) My lord!

CHARLES

(taking her hand) Yes, come!

There's much to do. We will think of the dead,
For that may keep them near us! speak to them,
And they may answer, while we wait—may float
Dim words on moonbeams to us . . . Oh, for one
That shall sound of forgiveness and of rest!

(Dropping her hand)

Oh, I've started on the mountain's brow
A tremor that has loosed the avalanche,
And penitence too late, too late, too late,
Was powerless as flowers along its path!

(He sinks back into his chair, staring before him)

THE END

AUTUMN WISDOM

Wisdom is on me,
Breathed from a golden moon that Autumn ripens
The chill air is empty of all passion.
The streets are lanes where love has been;
Dead leaves cover them.

The wind's sigh is old;
No other voice has the night, save the owl's
In the sycamore of my neighbor
Between me and the moon
There is no call of far things or wild things,
For the urge of the year is spent,
Or changed to resignation.

I do not think of Helen of Troy,
Of Juliet's balcony—and joy,
But of Saint John on Patmos . . .

Of Antoninus tenderly mystic
Toward a mad Universe . . .
Of sinking stars. . .

FINITUDE

I

One ruby, amid a diamond spray of stars,
 The coast-light flashes;
 The tide splashes,
Across a mile of bay-sweet land the moon
 Comes soon:
She has lost half of her lustre and looks old.

A cricket, finitude's incarnate cry,
And the infinite waters with their hushless sigh
 Are the two sounds
 The night has:
Each in eternal wistfulness abounds.

II

I have wakened out of my sleep because I too
 Am wistful,
 Tristful;
Because I know that half of *me* is gone,
And that all frailty cries in the cricket's tone.

I have wakened out of my sleep to watch and listen.
 For what?
To see for a moment universes glisten;
To wonder and want—and go to sleep again,
 And die,
And be forgot.

SUBMARINE MOUNTAINS

Under the sea, which is their sky, they rise
 To watery altitudes as vast as those

Of far Himalayan peaks impent in snows
And veils of cloud and sacred deep repose.
Under the sea, their flowing firmament,
More dark than any ray of sun can pierce,
The earthquake thrust them up with mighty tierce
And left them to be seen but by the eyes
Of awed imagination inward bent.

Their vegetation is the viscid ooze,
Whose mysteries are past belief or thought.
Creation seems around them devil-wrought,
Or by some cosmic urgency gone distraught.
Adown their precipices chill and dense
With the dank midnight creep or crawl or climb
Such tentacled and eyeless things of slime,
Such monster shapes as tempt us to accuse
Life of a miscreative impotence.

About their peaks the shark, their eagle, floats,
In the thick azure far beneath the air,
Or downward sweeps upon what prey may dare
Set forth from any silent weedy lair.
But one desire on all their slopes is found,
Desire of food, the awful hunger strife,
Yet here, it may be, was begun our life,
Here all the dreams on which our vision dotes
In unevolved obscurity were bound.

Too strange it is, too terrible! And yet
It matters not how we were wrought or whence
Life came to us with all its throb intense,
If in it is a Godly Immanence.
It matters not,—if haply we are more
Than creatures half-conceived by a blind force
That sweeps the universe in a chance course:
For only in Unmeaning Might is met
The intolerable thought none can ignore.

BETWEEN LIVES

Why should I not forget you
Here, under the sod?
There are roots and rain to listen to,
And the blind mole's plod,
For as long as I can listen,
Ere I be a clod.
(I haven't heard anything yet,
Or seen anything of God.)

Why must I still remember?
A leaf falls from a limb,
That I know, for to dead things
My sense does not dim.
I wish God's pity would tell me
As plain if love's but a whim.
(But I haven't heard anything yet,
Or seen anything of Him.)

I have but lain and waited,
Unwilling to forget;
Hoping to hear your heart beating
With a vain regret.
But the only breath that beats here
Is the rain's, sad and wet.
(And if there's any Hereafter
I have not learned, yet.)

COSMISM

The sea asleep like a dreamer sighs;
The salt rock-pools lie still in the sun,
Except for the sidling crab that creeps
Through the moveless mosses green and dun.
The small grey snail clings everywhere,
For the tide is out; and the sea-weed dries
Its tangled tresses in the warm air,
That seems to ooze from the far blue skies,
Where not a white gull on white wing flies.

The mollusc gleams like a gem amid
The scurf and the clustered green sea-grapes,
Whose trellis is but the rock's bare side,
Whose husbandman but the tide that drapes.
The little sandpiper tilts and picks
His food, on the wet sea-marges hid,
Till sudden a wave comes in and flicks
Him off, then flashes away to bid
Another frighten him—as it did.

O sweet is the world of living things,
And sweet are the mingled sea and shore!
It seems as if I never again
Shall find life ill—as oft before.
As if my days should come as the clouds
Come yonder—and vanish without wings;
As if all sorrow that ever shrouds
My soul and darkly about it clings
Had lost for ever its ravengings.

As if I knew with a deeper sense
That good alone is ultimate;
That never an evil wrought of God
Or man came truly out of hate.
That Better springs from the heart of Worse,
As calm from the heaving elements;
That all things born to the Universe
May suffer and perish utterly hence,
But never refute its Innocence.

From ETCHINGS.

I

COLD

Winter . . . and still winter!
Down hill stagger the corn-stooks, heavy with ice.
Sheep in the bottom shiver.

The abandoned barn crumbles with wind and cold.
An elm darns like a crone above it,
With needle limbs that creak and clash
In and out endlessly:
But a rent of the sky still lets the snow in.
And my heart lets in the chill of the years . . .
Of the years!

II

PASSAGE

A dark sail,
Like a wild-goose wing,
Where the sunset was.
The moon soon will silver its sinewy flight
Through the night watches,
And the far flight
Of those immortal migrants,
The ever-returning stars.

III

TWILIT RIVERS

Little rivers at twilight,
Little wintry rivers,
Running between brown trees
With mistletoed branches;
Catching dark shivery shadows
Of boughs into your bosoms,
And a pale silvery star
Between burnt clouds of gold. . . .
Little lowly rivers,
How sad your spirit shimmers!
All the land's rainy loneliness
Is running in your flow;
While farm-lights faintly quiver
And brown hills freeze about you
And the music of the sheep-bells
Falls silent in the fold.

SEA-HOARDINGS

My heart is open again and sea flows in,
It shall fill with a summer of mists and winds and clouds and waves breaking,
Of gull-wings over the green tide, of the surf's drenching din,
Of sudden horizon-sails that come and vanish, phantom-thin,
Of arching sapphire skies, deep and unaching.

I shall lie on the rocks just over the weeds that drape
The clear sea-pools, where birth and death in sunny ooze are teeming,
Where the crab in quest of booty sidles about, a sullen shape,
Where the snail creeps and the mussel sleeps with wary valves agape,
Where life is too grotesque to be but seeming.

And the swallow shall weave my dreams with threads of flight,
A shuttle with silver breast across the warp of the waves gliding;
And an isle far out shall be a beam in the loom of my delight,
And the pattern of every dream shall be a rapture bathed in light—
Its evanescence a beauty most abiding.

And the sunsets shall give sadness all its due.
They shall stain the sands and trouble the tides with all the ache of sorrow.
They shall bleed and die with a beauty of meaning old yet ever new,
They shall burn with all the hunger for things that hearts have failed to do,
They shall whisper of a gold that none can borrow.

And the stars shall come and build a bridge of fire
For the moon to cross the boundless sea, with never a fear of sinking.
They shall teach me of the magic things of life never to tire,
And how to renew, when it is low, the lamp of my desire—
And how to hope, in the darkest deeps of thinking.

MOMENTS

A crow caws,
On the pine tops,
In the sun.
Silence.
Eternity seems begun.

Again the caw,
Where the pine tops
And sky blend.
Shrillness.
Eternity seems to end.

INCREDIBLE!

It must be I am mistaken; one bird note
Cannot have all this power upon my heart,
To which the breath of violin-swept symphonies,
Or clarioned concertos,
Has merely been as music, muted or mighty!

Winter has gone, I know; but how can spring,
That has not come, suddenly blossom through me,
Leafily,
Because one little lark upon a limb
Ripples his throat?

I am too near nature's creative rapture;
I am caught by it—I who have sought to capture.
How can I walk again on heels and toes,
Who have winged with poetry beyond all prose!

THE POOL

'What has fallen into my heart?'
Said the pool.
(It was the sky.)
'Blue it is, and very cool,
Blue and brave and beautiful;
And never a ripple waving from it
Makes me sigh.'

'What has fallen into my heart?'
Came again.
(It was the stars.)

'Purple followed the blue, and then
Softly—though I knew not when—
Twinklings of gold, dropping silently
Through night's bars.'

EGOIST

In the night wood between the nether glow
Of the evening star and the lake,
A whippoorwill cries his name
Over and over again without shame,
As if the utmost meaning of life were in it.
The cool slender crescent of the moon,
Ready to sink under the earth soon,
Should hush him with its quiet mystery,
Or the silent immortality of the stars should
But, seeming to think it is the world's sole duty
To hear whatever *he* says of love and beauty,
He cries on—the passion in his breast
Demanding to be heard without rest.
Yet what he cries, loud and long and shrill,
Is only—"Whippoorwill! Whippoorwill!"

BROTHER BEASTS

Winter is here
And there are no leaves
On the naked trees,
Save stars twinkling
As the wind blows.
Soft to the branches
The little screech-owl
Silently comes,
Silently goes,
With weird tremolos.

I would go out
And gather the stars
The wind shakes down,

Were they not scattered
So far in the West.
I would go ask
The little screech-owl
If he finds ease
There in his nest
After his quest.

I would go learn
If the small grey mouse
Who sets up house
In the frozen meadow
Dreams of the stars;
Or what he thinks
There in the dark
When flake on flake
Of white snow bars
Him in with its spars.

I would go out
And learn these things,
That I may know
What dream or desire
Troubles my brothers
In nest or hole.
For even as I,
The owl and the mouse,
Or blinded mole
With unborn soul,
May have some goal.

A WOMAN WRONGED

I am dead and in my grave.
Let me alone.
The seeping of rains down through me,
And the reaching of roots down after me,
And the skimming of leaves above me, are enough.
Let me alone.

You have had *your* will of me,
So wherefore, now,
Should your questions creep here to me,
And the roots of your doubt reach at me,
And your thoughts restively skim and shudder above me?
Let me alone.

Would you rifle the grave too?
Go away.
I have nothing left for your taking.
My hair is not gold, but dust now.
My eyes are not stars, but stillness.
My flesh is not beauty aflame, but very cool.
Let me alone.

CECILY

She had a laugh
That took Joy by the hand
And made it dance tip-toe.
And her eyes danced
Till laughter out of Grief
Would overflow.

Wild as a spot of sun
Upon a windy day
Her heart was, . . .
Ever at play!

Was, did I say?
Well . . .
In a padded cell,
Three hundred sixty-three,
She picks the sunbeams now
From off her knee,
And flings them from her and cries,
'Vile—they're vile!'

AN INTERIOR

Because you cannot sit with me
 And read a book when night has come,
 But press your hands upon your breast
 And give your eyes to all unrest;
 Because at windows and at doors
 You glance, and wait the least wind-tap
 Of pines against the prescient pane,
 And if it does not come are fain,
 Suddenly starting from your chair,
 To go and see what may be there,—
 I know that you can only care
 For that which is not anywhere:

For that which calls without a voice,
 Which moves without a shape,
 Which wills, but ever without choice;
 Which brings death—not escape.

A NIGHT IN AVIGNON

CHARACTERS

FRANCESCO PETRARCA	.....	A Young Poet and Scholar
GHERARDO	.....	His Brother, A Monk
LELLO	.....	His Friend
ORSO	.....	His Servant
FILIPPA	.....	} ..... Ladies of Light Life in Avignon
SANCIA	.....	
MADONNA LAURA		

A NIGHT IN AVIGNON

SCENE: A room in the chambers of Petrarca at Avignon. It opens on a loggia overlooking, on higher ground, the spired church of Santa Clara and the gray cloisters of a Carthusian Monastery. Behind lie the city walls under the glamor of the blue Provençal night.

The room, faintly frescoed, is lighted with many candles; some glittering on a wine table heavy with wines toward the right front. A door on the left leads to other rooms, and an arrased one opposite, down to the street.

Bookshelves and a writing desk strewn with a lute and writings are also on the left; a crimson couch is in the centre; and garlands of myrtle and laurel deck the wine-table.

GHERARDO, the monk, is seated by the desk, following with severe looks the steps of PETRARCA, who is walking feverishly to and fro.

GHERARDO

(after a pause)

Listen. Another word, Francesco.

PETRARCA

Aih!

And then another—that will breed another.

GHERARDO

Dote on this Laura still—if still you must:

Woman's your destiny.

But quench these lights and set away that wine.

PETRARCA

And to no other lips turn? hers denied me?

Never, Gherardo!

GHERARDO

Honor bids you.

PETRARCA

(turning away)

Vainly!

I've borne until I will not . . . for it is

Two years now since in the aisles

Of Santa Clara yonder my heart first

Went from me on mad wings.

Two years this April morning

Since it fell fluttering before her feet . . .

As she stood there beside our blessed Lady,

Gowned as young Spring in green and violets! . . .

GHERARDO

And those two years have been inviolate;

Your life as pure as hers,

As virgin—

Save for the songs you've sung to her; those songs
This idle city echoes with. But now—

PETRARCA

Now I will open all the gates to Pleasure!
To rosy Pleasure—warm, unspiritual,
Ready to spring
Into the arms of all
Whom bloodless Virtue pales.
For, of restraint and hoping, I have drunk
But a vintage of tears.
And what has been my gain?

GHERARDO

Her chastity.

PETRARCA

A chastity unchallenged of desire—
And therefore none!
Aih, none!
For, were it other;
Could I aver that once, that ever once
Her lids had fallen low in fear of love,
I'd bid the desert of my heart burn dry—
To the last oasis—
With resignation!
But never have they, never! and I'm mad.
(Pours out wine)

GHERARDO

And you will seek to cure it with more madness?
To cast the devil of love out of your veins
With other love and lower?

PETRARCA

(recklessly)

With little Sancia's!

(Drinks)

Whose soul is a sweet sin!
Who lives for but this life and asks of Death
Only a breath of time, before he ends it,

To mark three beads and fill her mouth with *aves*.
 "Just for enough," she says,
 "To tell God that He made me—as He did."

GHERARDO

And to blaspheme with—O obsessed man?

(Abjuringly)

But you will fail! For this vain revelry
 Will ease not. And I see all love is base—
 As say the fathers—
 All . . . and the body of woman
 Is vile from the beginning.

PETRARCA

Monkish lies!

(Drinks again for courage)

The body of woman's born of bliss and beauty.
 Only one thing is fairer—that's her soul.

GHERARDO

And is that Word which says thou shalt not look
 Upon another's wife a monkish lie?
 Your Laura is another's.

PETRARCA

(in distress)

As I found,

After my heart became a poison flame
 Within me!

A fierce inquisitor against my peace!
 After I followed her from Santa Clara,
 That mass-hour,
 To an escutcheoned door!
 After and not before . . . And such another's!
 Ugo di Sade's!

A beast whose sullen mind two thoughts would drain;
 Who is unkind . . . I've seen her weep; who loves
 Her not . . . And yet the fane of song I frame her,
 The love I burn on it, she laughs away.
 To hide her own? . . . I will not so believe.

GHERARDO

Nor should you.

PETRARCA

Yet you bid me quarry still

The deeps of me to shrine her?

And be Avignon's laughter?

A mock, a titter on the tongue of geese

Who gad the city gates?

A type of fools who sigh while others kiss?

At whom the daily taunt is,

"See! Messer Petrarca!

Who never clasps his mistress—save in a sonnet!

Who fills empty canzone with his passion—

But never her ears!

Never!—though she was wed against her will

To an unlettered boor out bartering—

One whom she well could leave, but to whom . . .

(More recklessly)

Sonnets? They are vain, all! . . .

(Scatters a sheaf from his desk)

But Lello comes, and brings me Sancia!

Filippa! merry Filippa and Sancia!

We'll drink!—wine of Rocello!

Wine of the Rhine! Bienna! San Porciano!—

And kiss! . . .

(Throws back his head)

Kiss with the lips of life and not of . . .

(A knell has begun to beat from the Church without. It beats louder. He hears it and sinks crossing himself to the couch)

(GHERARDO exalted shudders)

GHERARDO

It is the knell of Matteo Banista,

Whose soul has gone for its licentious days

Upon steep Purgatory.

(Prepares to go)

Your sin be on you . . . and it will.

PETRARCA

(starting up)

No—no! . . .

(Half fearfully)

But hear, Gherardo! Hear—and answer me.

There in the cloister have you peace—in prayer?

In visions—penances? . . .

Swear that you have! swear truly and I . . . No, never!

(He wipes his brow)

While we are in the world the world's in us.

The holy Church I own—

Confess her Heaven's queen—

But we are flesh and all things that are fair

God made us to enjoy—

Or, high in Paradise, we'll know but sorrow.

You though would ban earth's beauty

Even the torch of glory

That kindled Italy once and led great Greece—

The torch of Plato, Homer, Virgil, all

The sacred bards and sages pagan-born!

I love them! they are divine;

And so tonight . . . ! . . .

(A lute and laughter are heard)

They! It is they! Lello! and Filippa!

And Sancia! . . . Little Sancia!

(The lute sounds louder, then a song gaily bursting:)

To the maids of Saint Remy
 All the gallants go for pleasure!
 To the maids of Saint Remy—
 Tripping to love's measure!

To the dames of Avignon
 All the masters go for wiving!
 To the dames of Avignon—
 That shall be their shriving!

(PETRARCA goes to the loggia, where LELLO shouts up)

LELLO

Ho-ho! Petrarca! Pagan! Are you in?
 What! are you sonnet-monger?

PETRARCA

In, and waiting!
 (Motions GHERARDO to go)

LELLO

Come then! Your door is locked! down! let us in!
 (Rattles it)

PETRARCA

Hold, ribald! The key is there—on the sill!
 Look for it and ascend!
 (ORSO enters)

Stay, here is Orso!

(The old servant passes through and down to meet them. A moment and they tramp in singing:)

Guelph! Guelph! and Ghibelline!
 Ehyo! ninni! Onni onz!
 I went fishing on All Saints' Day
 And caught but human bones!

I went fishing on All Saints' Day.
 The Rhone ran swift, the wind blew black!
 I went fishing on All Saints' Day—
 But my love called me back!

She called me back and she kissed my lips—
 Oh, my lips! Oh, onni onz!
 "Better take life than death," said she,
 "Better take love than bones, bones!"
 (SANCIA kisses PETRARCA)
 "Better take love than bones!"

PETRARCA

(seizing SANCIA to him)
 Yes, little Sancia! and you, my friends!
 Warm love is better, better!

And braver! Come, Lello! give me your hand!
And you, Filippa! No, I'll have your lips!

SANCIA

(interposing)

So soon? One at a time, Messer Petrarca!
You learn too fast. Mine only for tonight.

PETRARCA

And for a thousand nights, my Sancia!

FILIPPA

You hear him? Santa Madonna! pour us wine,
To pledge him in!

PETRARCA

The tankards bubble over!

(At the wine table)

And see, they are wreathed of April,
With loving myrtle and laurel intertwined.
We'll hold symposium, as bacchanals!

SANCIA

And that is—what? some dull and silly show
Out of your sallow books?

PETRARCA

Those books were writ

With ink of the gods, my Sancia, upon
Papyri of the stars!

SANCIA

And long ago?

Ha! long ago?

PETRARCA

Returnless centuries!

SANCIA

(contemptuously)

Who loves the past, loves mummies and their dust—
And he will mould!

Who loves the future loves what may not be,
 And feeds on fear.
 Only one flower has time—its name is "Now!"
 Come, pluck it! pluck it!

LELLO

Brava, maid! the Now!

SANCIA

(dancing)
 Come, pluck it!

PETRARCA

By my body and soul I will!

(Again seizing her)
 It grows upon these lips—and if tonight
 They leant out over the brink of Hell, I would.

FILIPPA

Wine first! and not kisses! Wine to wet
 And warm our wits with!

SANCIA

(free) O ever thirsty
 And ever thrifty Pippa! Well, pour out!

(Fills a cup)
 We'll drink to Messer Petrarca—
 Who's weary of his bedmate Solitude.
 May he long revel in the courts of Venus!

ALL

(drinking)
 Aih, long!

PETRARCA

As long as Sancia enchants them!

FILIPPA

I'd trust him not, Sancia. Put him to oath.

SANCIA

And to the rack, if faithless? This Filippa!
 Messer Petrarca, should she not be made

High Jurisconsult to our lord, the Devil,
 Whose breath of life is oaths? . . .
 . . . But, swear it! . . . by the Saints!
 Who were great sinners all!
 And by the bones of every monk or nun
 Who ever darkened the world!

LELLO

Or ever shall!

PETRARCA

(intimately)

I'll swear your eyes are singing
 Under the shadow of your hair, mad Sancia,
 Like nightingales in the wood.

SANCIA

Pah, Messer poet!

Such words as those you chant without an end—
 To the lady Laura!

PETRARCA

Stop! (Turning pale) Not her
 name here!

SANCIA

(disdainfully)

O-ho! this air will soil it? And it may
 Not sound so sweet in sonnets ever after?
 Shall we depart that he may still indite them?

(Derisively)

"To Laura—On the Vanity of Passion"?

"To Laura—Unrelenting"?

"To Laura—Whose Departing Darkens the Sky"?

(ORSO enters)

"To Laura—Who Deigns Not a Single Tear"?

Shall we depart?

LELLO

Enough, Sancia! peace!
 (She moves away scornfully)

PETRARCA

(to ORSO)

Speak.

ORSO

Sir—you are desired.

PETRARCA

By whom?

ORSO

Her veil

Was lifted and she told me:

Therefore I say it out—Madonna Laura.

(All stare—amazed and silent)

PETRARCA

What lie is this?

ORSO

I am too old to lie.

SANCIA

(laughing)

Who was the goddess that his books tell of,

The cold one, so long chaste, but who at last—

LELLO

Peace, I say, Sancia! . . . Francesco . . . ?

PETRARCA

(to ORSO)

Lead Monna Laura here . . . if it is she!

(As ORSO goes)

But you, my friends, must know how strange this is,

And how—! . . . I have no words! . . .

Wait me, I pray you, yonder, in that chamber.

(They go, left, SANCIA shrugging)

(LAURA, whom PETRARCO is helpless to greet, then enters—
falteringly, but nobly determining, comes down)

LAURA

Messer Petrarca . . . I have been impelled
To come . . . and as the purest should, boldly,
With lifted veil to say . . .

PETRARCA

(humbly)

Lady!

LAURA

To say—

Of gratitude I cannot give another . . .
For life to a woman is but resignation,
And that at last is shame . . .

PETRARCA

At last shame—?

LAURA

To say—Love is to us as light to the lilies
That lean by Mont Ventoux:
The love of one pure man for one pure woman.

PETRARCA

(dazed)

Lady! . . .

LAURA

Yes, and I've been unkind to you,
Ungentle ever.
But there's no other way sometimes for those
Who would be wholly true.
And yet . . . do I owe any truth to *him*?

PETRARCA

To—Ugo di Sade?

LAURA

(bitterly) Who is called my husband? . . .
How I was bound to him, you know! and how
I've dwelt and have endured more than his bursts
Of burning cruelty. For still, I thought,
He is my husband!

And still—he is my husband!
 But now no more I think it—oh, no more!
 Too visible it is
 That he belongs to any who sell love.
 So I may innocently say to you
 Who for two years have sung my name and suffered,
 Yet never once have turned unto another—
 I well may say . . .

(She is stopped by his manner)

There's something that you . . .

(Looks around and sees the reason for his shame—then of his greater shame as SANCIA calls out:)

SANCIA

Well, well, Messer Petrarca! How long will
 You shut us in this dark—that is as black
 As old Pope John the Twenty-Second's soul?
 A pretty festa, this!

PETRARCA

Merciless God!

(Falls abased before LAURA, tortured with remorse)

O lady, what have I done, beyond repair!

(She gathers her veil)

What have I lost within this gulf of shame!
 For a paltry pleasure have I sold my dream,
 Whose pinions would have lifted you at last?

LAURA

(palely—numbly)

I did not know, Messer Patrarca, you
 Had friends awaiting . . .
 I came tonight, as first I would have said,
 With holy gratitude—
 For a love I thought you gave:
 With gratitude that honor well could speak,
 I thought, and yet be honor;
 With gratitude forgetful of all else . . .
 And trusting . . . but no matter:
 All trust shall be embalmed and laid away.

I go with pity, seeing

My husband—is even as other men.

(She passes to the door and out. PETRARCA moans. LELLO then enters and comes to him anxiously)

LELLO

(touching his shoulder)

Francesco . . . !

PETRARCA

Lello! Lello! Have I dreamed?

(Rising: anguished)

Did Laura come to me out of the night—

Come as the first voice breaking beyond death

To one despairing? . . .

And was I lifted up to Heaven's dawn?

And then . . . did I fall . . . am I falling . . .

And shall I, ever . . . down this abyss? . . .

My friend, stay with me!

No, go! and take them with you—Sancia—all! . . .

I have slain the Spring forever!

The green of the whole fair world! . . . O Laura!

Laura!

(Sinks down on the couch and buries his face in his hands. LELLO goes sorrowfully out)

THE END

'THE MONSOON BREAKS!'

(India)

I

Panting, panting, panting,

Oh the terrible heat!

The fields crack

And the ryot's back

Bursts with the cruel beat.

The wells of the land are empty;

Six hundred feet, in vain,

The oxen lower the buckets o'er
And draw them up again.

Panting, panting, panting:
Parched are the earth and sky.
The elephant in the jungle
Sucks root and river dry.
The tiger, in whose throat
The desert seems to burn,
Paces the path,
The pool path—
But only to return.

Oh the terrible heat!
Oh the peacock's cry!
The whine of monkeys in the trees,
The children crawling on their knees.
Oh the terrible heat!
The gods will let us die:
Shiva and Parvati and all
To whom we beat the drum and call
Vouch us no reply.

II

Panting, panting, panting:
The plague is drawing near,
Hot is the sun, hot is the night,
And in the heat is fear.
The plague, of famine mate,
Is fumbling at the latch.
Soon his step—
Death-step!—
Listening we shall catch.

Oh! . . . soon his step!
There's heard the funeral chant;
There's smelt the funeral pyre;
The ghat is red with fire.

Oh the terrible heat!
The gods are adamant.
Will the monsoon
Let us swoon
Unto the last heart-beat?

III

Panting, panting, panting . . .
Go up toward the sea
And look again, ye holy men,
To learn if clouds may be.
Go up into your temples
With sacrifice and song.
Call to the gods,
The cruel gods,
Who beat us down with rays like rods:
Say that we wait too long!

Say that the wells are dry,
Say that our flesh is sand,
Say that the mother's milk is pain,
The child beats at her breast in vain,
Say that we curse the land.
Oh the terrible heat!
Say that even the moon
In fiery flight
Scorches the night.
Oh bring us the monsoon!

IV

Panting, panting, panting:
The nautch-girl cannot sing,
But drops her vina in the dust
And sinks, a shrivelled thing.
The fakir has acquired
No merit for six days,
But at the tank,
The shrine's tank,

That never before of vileness stank,
Babbles of water sprays.

V

Oh the terrible heat!
How long must we endure?
The holy men have come again,
The beating drums are fewer.
A cobra in their path
Licked out an angry tongue
Into the air—
Oh with despair
Is even the serpent stung!

VI

Panting, panting, panting:
The night again, and day;
And day again, and night again,
Burning their endless way.
The furnace sun goes down,
The branding stars come out
And sear the eyes
Like fiery flies
Settling upon them—Oh, ye skies,
A drop for us, we pray!

But one—upon the tongue!
To let us know you care.
But one—though it be wrung
Of breath sent up in prayer.
Oh the terrible heat!
Again the beating drums.
What do I hear?
A cry? A cheer? . . .
The priests are chanting? nearer, near?
Is it the monsoon comes?

The priests are chanting! . . . Oh,
What word is on their lips!

'The monsoon breaks! the monsoon breaks!'
 A darkness sudden grips
 My eyes: is it the shroud
 Of blindness, or—a cloud?
 The monsoon breaks?
 The rain awakes?
 Out of the darkened sky it shakes?—
 Louder they cry, and loud!

Oh loud! until at last
 The people hear bedazed;
 The sick who drank of burning air,
 The weak, the well, the crazed!
 The temple's sacred cow
 Lows gently at the door;
 The fakir makes his vow
 And chants his Vedic lore;
 But all lift up
 Their lips' cup
 And drink more of it, more!

And singing fills the air! . . .
 And soon the Summer's song
 Of greenness covers all the earth,
 For long the rain is, long!
 The rice is flooded far;
 While Shiva, Indra, all
 The gods, who are the world's laws,
 Are lulled to sleep,
 In temples deep,
 By praises without pause.

KINCHINJUNGA

I

(Which is next to the highest of mountains)

O white Priest of Eternity, around
 Whose lofty summit veiling clouds arise
 Of the earth's immemorial sacrifice

To Brahma in whose breath all lives and dies;
O Hierarch enrobed in timeless snows,
First-born of Asia whose maternal throes
Seem changed now to a million human woes,
Holy thou art and still! Be so, nor sound
One sigh of all the mystery in thee found.

II

For in this world too much is overclear,
Immortal Ministrant to many lands,
From whose ice-altars flow to fainting sands
Rivers that each libation poured expands.
Too much is known, O Ganges-giving sire;
Thy people fathom life and find it dire,
Thy people fathom death, and, in it, fire
To live again, though in Illusion's sphere,
Behold concealed as grief is in a tear.

III

Wherefore continue, still enshrined, thy rites,
Though dark Thibet, that dread ascetic, falls
In strange austerity, whose trance appalls,
Before thee, and a suppliant on thee calls.
Continue still thy silence high and sure,
That something beyond fleeting may endure—
Something that shall for evermore allure
Imagination on to mystic flights
Wherein alone no wing of Evil lights.

IV

Yea, wrap thy awful gulfs and acolytes
Of lifted granite round with reachless snows.
Stand for Eternity while pilgrim rows
Of all the nations envy thy repose.
Ensheathe thy swart sublimities, unscaled.
Be that alone on earth which has not failed.
Be that which never yet has yearned nor ailed,
But since primeval Power upreared thy heights
Has stood, above all deaths and all delights.

V

And though thy loftier Brother shall be King,
 High-priest be thou to Brahma unrevealed,
 While thy white sanctity for ever sealed
 In icy silence leaves desire congealed.
 In ghostly ministrations to the sun,
 And to the mendicant stars and the moon-nun,
 Be holy still, till East to West has run,
 And till no sacrificial suffering
 On any shrine is left to tell life's sting.

PRINCESS JEHANARA

Where the road leads from Delhi to the South,
 And dingy camel-trains creep in the dust
 Past ruin-heaps of old Firozabad
 And Indropat unpitied of the drouth;
 By a lone tree, above a Pool whose sad
 Prayer-water all the turban-people trust,
 Is a heat-hidden tomb, and on it just
 A few faint blades of bent and grieving grass.
 'Jehanara's it is'—with ready mouth
 A Moslem tells the travel-worn who pass
 To lordlier-rising tombs—'Jehanara's':
 One time her heart, heavy with pity, said:
The covering of the poor is only grass,
Let no more then be mine when I am dead.'

THE SONG OF MUEZZIN ABOUT

I wake at dawn and fling sleep from my eyes.
 The shade of Allah still is on His skies.
 Ere He shall lift it and let forth the sun
 My feet up the steep minaret have run.
Allahu akbar! 'llah il Allah! Allah!

And there, leaning expectant toward the East,
 I watch the first rays like a holy yeast
 Shoot through the heavy sleeping loaf of earth
 And quicken it again to a new birth.

And me they quicken to an ecstasy,
Till heaven like a mighty Mosque I see,
And Allah in it, the most high Imam,
Whose word has made me all I was and am.
Allahu akbar! 'llah il Allah! Allah!

And so at noon, and so again at night
I mount with all the soul of me alight,
And His Perfection to the four winds cry—
And so would do, so only, till I die!

And after death! for there, in Paradise,
Let others have pale houris as the price
Of their devotion to the Prophet's fame,
A minaret for me—and Allah's Name!
Allahu akbar! 'llah il Allah! Allah!

THE PILGRIMS OF THIBET

Down the road to Llassa,
Himalayan and strange,
I thought I saw them winding
From range to lower range,
The seekers after Buddha,
Across the ice and cold,
And from their lips the mystic phrase
Of merit ever tolled:

'Om mane padme, hum!'
Life is but a way of lust.
Turn the wheel and beat the drum,
Till we to Nirvana come.

Clothed in rags and turquoise
And necklaces of skulls,
And shoes of yak worn furless,
And fleece the shepherd culls,
With faces like to parchments
Whereon alone was writ

The repetition of these words

Of wonder infinite:

'Om mane padme, hum!'

Life is but a robe of lust.

Turn the wheel and beat the drum

Till we to Nirvana come.

Down the road ascetic

And desert bleak and drear,

I thought I saw them winding

To Llassa walls more near;

Strong man and maid and mother,

Shorn youth and sexless age,

That ever to the wind intoned

Their one acquitting page:

'Om mane padme, hum!'

Grief is but the goal of lust.

Turn the wheel and beat the drum,

Till we to Nirvana come.

Past the hermit's cavern—

Where he alone drew breath!—

Past nunneries where silence

Waits, acolyte of death;

Past shrines of lesser power,

Where smiling idols wear

The bliss upon their gilded lips

Of the all-granting prayer.

'Om mane padme, hum!'

Leave the life of flesh and lust.

Turn the wheel and beat the drum,

Till we to Nirvana come.

Down the road—and down it,

I saw them, lama-led,

Mid holy lakes and mountains,

And monasteries fed

With endless alms and measured
By slow prostrations round,
And by the chanted syllables
That sprung as from the ground:
'Om mane padme, hum!'
Life is but the lair of lust.
Turn the wheel and beat the drum,
Till we to Nirvana come.

Then at last to Llassa
They reach—I see them yet!—
And touch the gods on altars
Above all others set.
Monk, man and maid and mother,
Upon the Wheel of Things,
From which escape shall come alone
To him who ceaseless sings:
'Om mane padme, hum!'
End the life of greed and lust.
Turn the wheel and beat the drum,
Till we to Nirvana come.

PENANG

I want to go back to Singapore
And ship along the Straits,
To a bungalow I know beside Penang;
Where cocoanut-palms along the shore
Are waving, and the gates
Of Peace shut Sorrow out for evermore.
I want to go back and hear the surf
Come beating in at night,
Like the washing of eternity over the dead.
I want to see dawn fare up and day
Go down in golden light;
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

I want to go back to Singapore
And up along the Straits

To the bungalow that waits me by the tide.
Where the Tamil and Malay tell their lore
At evening—and the fates
Have set no soothless canker at life's core.
I want to go back and mend my heart
Beneath the tropic moon,
While the tamarind-tree is whispering thoughts
of sleep.
I want to believe that Earth again
With Heaven is in tune.
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

I want to go back to Singapore
And ship along the Straits
To the bungalow I left upon the strand.
Where the foam of the world grows faint before
It enters, and abates
In meaning as I hear the palm-wind pour.
I want to go back and end my days
Some evening when the Cross
On the southern sky hangs heavily far and sad.
I want to remember when I die
That life elsewhere was loss.
I want to go back to Penang! I want to go back!

THE FARING OF FA-HIEN

Through Gobiland's sea of sand,
Where pilgrim bones are mile-stones,
Where no birds sing, no beasts run,
Where there is only sun and sun,
Went Fa-Hien.

He was faring, a monk of Han,
Out through the desert, past Khotan;
Through hot winds and demon sands,
That haunted the way in swirling bands,
He was going to Buddha lands,
Was Fa-Hien.

His camel was chosen at Changan,
His place was bought in the caravan.
'All is *maya*, a dream of man,'
He said as the desert sea began,
And said it again as the hot sea ran,
Did Fa-Hien.

For the air was thirst, the sun desire,
And his blood became a passion fire.
He saw cool waves and soft-limbed slaves,
As only a man can see who craves.
'From woman nothing truly saves,'
Thought Fa-Hien.

But soon they vanished, one and all,
When he had reached Khotan's sure wall.
For stealing from its mystic calm
He thought he felt Lord Buddha's 'Om'
Laid on him like a spirit balm,
Did Fa-Hien.

So on, through perilous Hindu Kush,
Down to the Indus did he push,
Down rocky steeps, wild and hilly,
To where the Ganges flows stilly,
For he was fain of the Lotus-lily,—
Fa-Hien.

Yes, fain in the place of Buddha's birth
To find the Way of Priceless Worth;
In Kohana to reach Nirvana
And take back thence some secret manna—
For it is here, surely here,
Mused Fa-Hien.

And so, ten years, of monk and sage
He questioned, scanning the sutras' page;
And miracle—and magic too

He wandered through and pondered through,
Till spent he said, 'No Creed will do,'
Did Fa-Hien.

Then old light through him sifted back,
And life no more was *maya*-black.
'Nirvana's far from all who preach it;
But the world's near and I can reach it;
Give to me then what's good for men,'
Said Fa-Hien.

So forth he sailed from Ganges' mouth
To that fair emerald in the South,
To far Ceylon, and thence fared on,
Through desert seas, past night and dawn,—
His camel a ship by the winds drawn,
Did Ha-Hien.

And back to the tawny Yang-tze came,
Where life was teeming ever the same.
And when his junk, with the tide drunk,
Was moored, he said, 'I'm still a monk,
But I am a man who trusts time's plans,
I, Fa-Hien.'

BY THE CH'EN GATE

At dusk as wild geese winged their aery way
Upon the sunset over proud Peking,
To where, darker than jade, the mountains lay,
Set in the misty gold of dying day,
I stood upon the mighty Tartar wall
By the great-towered gate, the Ch'en, and felt
The yellow myriads move to it and melt,
As in some opiate's sleep imagining.
And slowly through there came a caravan
Of swinging camels out of far Thibet,
Upon their tawny flanks the foam still wet
And in their eyes the desert's ancient span.

What dreams they bore to me I now forget,
But through me rang the name of Kubla Khan.

A PAINTING OF MA-LIN

Just because you painted it so, Ma-lin,
The rock and the pine-tree springing from it and the water,
And the sampan half fading round
The dark of the rock toward the high cliff
That dimly shadows the distance,
Where birds are only wings,
I know that you loved vanishing things.

And I know you felt as the sampan passed on the river flowing
That life as a wind in a dream is ever going,
And that its strange sad evanescence
Alone brings beauty's presence.

And I know that the lean of the pine out over the water
Meant to your sense, as now to mine,
The mute mysterious immanence
Of death in the world;
And that, because of death's suffusion,
You longed to think all things Illusion.

Yes, Ma-Lin, brother of mine, I know these things,
Though a thousand years have flown since then
Under the bridge of the sky,
And though no longer you look on it, but I.
For graciously thus does the magic of art
Give wings to the heart!

A CHINESE POET

(By the Whang-Ho)

Today the lightest breeze
Takes tribute from the trees.
Golden leaves flutter down,
Crimson leaves, purple, brown,

On the tide, past the town . . .
Down!

I walk along the shore,
Like many gone before,
And sadly ask, What matters it,
One leaf, or life, more?

K'U-KIANG

Because the sun like a Chinese lantern
Set in a temple of clouds tonight,
I was back in K'u-Kiang!

Because in a temple of dragon clouds,
As if with incense misty red,
It hung there over the rim of the sea,
I was back in a narrow street,
Where amber faces pass all day,
Going to pay, going to pray,
Going the same old human way
They have gone for a thousand years, men say,
In K'u-Kiang.

And I heard the coolie cry for his fare,
I heard the merchant praise his ware
Of bronze and porcelain set to snare,
In K'u-Kiang!

I saw strange streaming signs in black
With gold and crimson on their back—
Opiate signs in an opiate street;
Where the slip and patter of felt-shod feet
Is old as the sun;
And the temple-door
As cool and dark as the night.
And where dim lanterns swinging there,
As a lure to human grief and care,
Half reveal and half conceal
The ancestral gloom of the gods.
I saw all this with sudden pang,

As if by hashish swept or bhang,
Because the sun, like a Chinese lantern,
Set in a temple of clouds.

IN A CHINESE RESTAURANT

'Chop suey,' I say to Chung Li,
Quaint, quiet, and twenty-three,
Who smiles as I wearily enter the door
Through a curtain of beads and teak.

'Chop suey. Soon,' he answers me,
And slips away like wind in the tree
On the lacquered screen in the corner.
But I feel in his eye, still as a stone
In an idol's head on a temple's throne,
A myriad years
Of the Whang-Ho,
As it tawnily runs
Under the suns
Of Honan.

For Chung's eye holds, as a jade its hue,
His gods and the long ancestral line
Of the sires he prays to.
And it holds the pines by a tea-house door
At the foot of a mountain age-divine;
And the tea-girl's lute, for the traveller strung,
And the misty moon she plays to;
And even, I think, the memory
Of a sire who one day bowed and poured
Wine for Confucius, and adored
The Sage, foot-sore and weary.

So when I am sick of the noise and heat,
Of the Now, which never is complete,
Of the rude strife in the rude street,
I go to Chung.

LOVE IN JAPAN

The *semi* is silent
(Autumn rains!)
The wind-bells tinkle
(How chill it is!)
The quick lights come
On the *shoji*-panes.
Come, A Baku,
Eater of dreams!

The maple darkens
(Pale grow I!)
The near night shivers
(The Temple fades.)
Haunting love
Will not cease to cry!
Come, O Baku,
Eater of dreams!

The wild mists gather
(Ah, my tears!)
The pane-lights vanish
(For some there is rest.)
But for me—
The remembered years!
Come, O Baku,
Eater of dreams!

O-TSUYA FORSAKEN

(She tells of following her lover to find him faithless)
My *geta* clacked. A paper lantern moved, led by a hand,
before me. The wind moaned. A wet pine struck my face.
It seemed as if I heard the river rushing o'er me.

I followed. In the tea-house Geisha danced *The Death of Spring*. Their shadows fell like petals on the *shoji* . . .
I felt a creeping mist about me cling.

The bridge was darkly arched. Midway the lantern waited.
 Pale as the hidden moon the hand was! . . . his! . . .
 She came! . . . Will the gods ever know how much I hated?

They went . . . up through the *torii*, by a shrine.
 Upon the lantern *Amida* I read. . . . No more shall Amida be
 god of mine!

It is not far to the river—down to death. The stars
 swirled—a conflagration. . . . And yet I could not go.—
 Shall he be mine in no reincarnation?

FOR LITTLE CHO SAN

Snow on the bamboo, sigh and fall,
 Snow on the willow, snow on the cherry,
 Little Cho San's two breasts are cold;
 All the days of her joy are told;
 No more is she merry.

Soon they will lay her under the mosses,
 Under the pines high over the town.
 The temple-bell in hill-mist hangs there,
 Ghostly brown.
 Snow on the pine-tree shading the bell,
 Sigh, softly, and tremble down;
 Sound her a knell!

(Little Cho San, do you hear the sound?
 Bare are the branches, all around!)

POETIC EPIGRAMS

(*After the fashion of the Japanese*)

I

THE YOUNG MOON

The young moon is so shy
 She slips away
 Ere stars half fill the sky.

II

GHOSTLINESS

Whose touch, ancestral, far,
Flits through me now,
Like light from a dead star?

III

AUTUMN SADNESS

From grief no hope could numb—
All the world's grief—
Does Autumn sadness come.

IV

THE FAITHLESS

A church-bell in the dawn:
But, like the dead,
I too—alas!—sleep on.

V

PILGRIMS

My soul wears like the snail
Its body-house:
And fares with pace as frail.

VI

LOVE LETTERS RETURNED IN SPRING

How many petals fall!
Yet in my heart
They once were growing all!

VII

IN A CEMETERY AT NIGHT

Is it ghost-dreams that rise
Up from each grave—
Or only the fire-flies?

VIII

KINDRED

The butterfly and flower
Surely were made
By earth in the same hour.

IX

THE LIGHTNING

The lightning seems a tongue,
Mad with the heat,
That summer has outflung.

X

THE AUTUMN MOON

Long since the moon has found
Nirvana's calm,
In her desireless round.

XI

SCRIPT

No word the wild geese cry,
But only write
In silence on the sky.

XII

AT NIGHT

The wind seems like a prayer
Of earth to God,
Unanswered everywhere.

XIII

BY ONE JUST DEAD

Though but an hour has sped
He is as dumb
As one ten aeons dead.

XIV

THE FROST

How flowerlike the frost!
Can winter be
Creative Summer's ghost?

XV

NOVEMBER LEAVES

In the least leaf of all
Death takes, I hear
The universes fall.

XVI

TO AN UNTHINKING OPTIMIST

On wave or cloud or sand,
Equally well,
A rainbow's arch will stand.

XVII

AT TWILIGHT

The silent plebiscite
Of stars comes on,
Voting, "Let there be night."

XVIII

ON THE WEST

Curled in a dark cocoon
Of soft shadow,
The chrysalis of the moon!

XIX

BY THE SEA

White on each mounded wave
The wind lays wreaths,
As on a nameless grave.

XX

MIST AT NIGHT

Have they become this wraith,
The wingless prayers
Of weary sad unfaith?

XXI

A WIDOW IN A CEMETERY

A lonely twilit thing
Wondering where
The sun has taken wing

XXII

A CRY IN THE DESERT

God is no more nor worse
Than a mirage
Hope sees on the universe.

XXIII

A BROOK IN WINTER

Strange as a frozen dream
In a dead brain
Is this stilled winter stream.

XXIV

WINTER

Under a priestly stole
Of snow earth lies,
With silence for a soul.

XXV

PREMONITION

The wind of a falling star
Blows over me,
Coming from very far.

XXVI

LOST

The wild geese find their way
Even at night:
Yet I cannot by day.

XXVII

AGE AND DEATH

My fire has burnt so low
That he who knocks
Is not a guest, I trow!

XXVIII

THE DEAD THINKER

In the slow silent hearse
He takes his way
Home to the Universe.

A WORD'S MAGIC

Do you remember Etajima,
And how, upon a moon-fogged sea,
As ghostly as ever a tide shall be,
We passed an island silently?

And how a low voice in the gloom
Of the temple pine-trees leaning there
Said *sayonara* to one somewhere
Unseen in the shadow-haunted air?

Just *sayonara*: but it seemed
The soul of all farewells that night,
The sigh of all withdrawn delight,
The sound of love's last rapture-rite.

And now, after long years, it comes
Again from isles of memory

To bring once more to birth in me
The breath of all lost witchery.

Yes, one low word of parting, now
Echoing, through the fog of years,
Has touched my heart with beauty's tears,
And youth through all things reappears.

THE PILGRIM

(As a Temple Bell sounds)

A temple bell!—
And lo, to me,
Who fare far out to sea,
It brings the gloom
Of the temple room—
And the holy image
Of Buddha seated
Upon his lotus!

And so I pray:
'O Calm One! in
The new lives that I win
Let me as the sound
Of a bell be found
To waken worship
In souls that wander
Toward Nirvana!'

LANDFALL

Landfall at dawn, and Madeira rose from the sea,
Summited by the sun, a miracle that poured
Soft dream-gold down shadowy slopes
And dark ravines still sleeping,
To the white surf breaking
Against barbaric shores.

O the lift of the heart, when islands lift from the sea, thus,
 After long days of believing there is no land in the world.
 Who, from a vessel's bow,
 Beholds them is a Columbus,
 Crying 'San Salvador!'
 And sinking glad to his knees.

GIORGIONE

The Characters

GIORGIONE A Young Painter, Called GIORGIO
 ARETINO A Satirist
 TITIAN Giorgio's Rival
 BELLINI The Former Master of Giorgio and Titian
 GIGIA An Old Woman Serving Giorgio
 and
 ISOTTA

GIORGIONE

Scene: A work-room of GIORGIONE at Venice, on the edge of the Lagoon in which lie the Campo Santo and Murano. It is littered with brushes, canvases, casts, etc., and its walls are frescoed indiscriminately with saints and bacchantes, satyrs and Madonnas, on backgrounds religious or woodland. A door is at the right back; and foliate gothic windows, in the rear, reveal the magic water with its gliding gondolas. On an easel support toward the centre of the room is a picture—covered—and not far from it, a couch.

Late afternoon.

GIORGIONE, who has been sitting anguished on the couch, rises bitterly. As he does so, BELLINI enters anxiously.

BELLINI

Giorgione!

GIORGIO

Master, you? (Turns away)

BELLINI

Your word came to me,

In San Lazzario, where I labored late.—

You will not do this!

GIORGIO

(bitterly)

Yes!

BELLINI

(pointing to picture) Display her body,
Which your eyes alone have seen and painted,
To wanton Aretino, and Titian?

GIORGIO

(relentlessly)

Though it has been till now my adoration,
The fairest of my dreams, and more holy
Than lilies pressed to the white breast of the Virgin!
Yes, by the virtue of all honest women,
If such there be in Venice,
I'll have it borne aloft by ribald hands
Through the very streets—for pimps of the Piazza
To whet their pandering appetites upon.

BELLINI

And to what end?

GIORGIO

Her shame—and derision!

BELLINI

The hot revengeful deeds of wounded love
Often fall back upon and burn the doer,
As this may upon you.

GIORGIO

If so, I care not.

BELLINI

Nor ever have, to heed me! Else the tongue
And pen of Aretino could not now
So readily turn the city's praise from you
To Titian, as with scurrile jests they do.
Your wild will runs ever without curb,
And I who reared you as my own son
Must pay the fall!

GIORGIO

(unhappily) Master! . . .

BELLINI

And the appeasement

And piety I would have won you to
 In past days are wasted. For the Madonnas
 I paint with holy hues inspired of Heaven,
 You paint no more at all, or if so only
 With pride and the incontinent urge of passion.

GIORGIO

And gratitude, master, with that too!
 For never could I forget how as a lad,
 Pallid and patched and orphaned by the plague,
 I came to Venice, destitute of all
 Save a quick eye to see and hand to shape.
 And how you took me in, believingly,
 And taught me beauty . . . as only you can—
 Until my name is linked now with yours
 In glory, even the very gondoliers
 On the canals crying it, and vying
 To ferry me without pay . . . And soon, master,
 It would have glowed immortal on the breast
 Of all applauding Italy,
 As does "Apelles" on the page of Greece,
 For in me was a vision half divine,
 That would have streamed from me endlessly
 In pictures, had this girl—

BELLINI

Yes, had not she,

Whose beauty you so foolishly have fixed
 Your heart upon, you who should have lived
 With but one passion, that of brain and brush,
 Had she not without reason—

GIORGIO

Say it, master!

Had she not left me, as a dog
 Is left behind in the house,

Though I had proudly chosen her above
A hundred willing others to revel with
And then to wed in peace—had she not left me,
Though I had meant one day to lift her up,
As you have lifted me, so high in Venice
That all the city would be a halo for her,
As cities of old for queens of sceptred love;
Had she not gone away . . . shamelessly,
With Luzzi, a lank boy!

BELLINI

It is most strange.

GIORGIO

Nothing a woman does is ever strange!
Will they not cloak a lie in innocence,
A treachery in veiling soft caresses,
Though to the mass they fare, night and noon,
And lift up *Aves* unremittingly?
Have they a want that is not rank with guile,
A tear that is not turgid with deceit,
A passion not enslaved by every wind—
As was that Greek Helen's, for whose love
The walls of Troy so fatuously fell?—
Why then should I, whose glory might in time
Have rivalled Raphael's, or Leonardo's,
Not bare her painted body to the eyes
Of any beholder?

BELLINI

Because she is a woman,
Whom you, though with fond intent, tempted,
And who perhaps has not indeed—

GIORGIO

Betrayed me?

But may return beguilingly,
And with the heart of a nymph, the soul of a nun,
Lure me again to doting dreams of her,
And of her unforgettable white body,

Which God might once have moulded angels after?
 Or having returned, would not whispers follow us
 Wherever we chanced to go, such whispers as,
 "Isotta there, see! Giorgione's mistress,
 Who makes a mockery of him"?

BELLINI

Only a brain

So blinded by chagrin would suppose it!
 For this I'll say of her, that if indeed
 She has forsaken you, the reason for it
 Is not a new-found passion. And should her body
 Be given, as you intend, to lustful eyes,
 Life might be smitten from her.

GIORGIO

As it should!

BELLINI

Then penitently from you, my son, as well?
 No, no. I have not toiled to see you rise,
 A planet from the sea, the world's first painter,
 Only to set in sterile desolation.
 You owe my fathering more . . . And now the means
 To pay me with are here—in this offer.

(Draws out a document)

It comes from the Signoria in Council,
 And will enable you to plant your future
 With deathless laurels, under the shade of which
 Issota shall be forgotten. For it declares you
 The chief glory of Venice—
 And grants you sole permission to adorn
 San Marco's highest altar with your visions.

GIORGIO

A grant of pity, that but sinks me further
 Into the mire of shame! . . . Therefore tell them,
 These silk and velvet signors of the Piazza,
 Whose condescending ducats buy the dreams
 Of the immortal—

BELLINI

That with scorn only

You answer them?

GIORGIO

And wound their kindness? No.

BELLINI

Your ways have ever been the ways of wounding.

GIORGIO

(wretchedly)

And must be still, then! For now my hand
Is palsied . . . it will never paint again!
Color and shaping light change within me
To blindness and to chaos, to despair;
I strive, and only impotence arises
Before my spent palette; for when Isotta
Deserted me all beauty vanished with her.—
But for the loss of it she shall atone!

(Going to door and calling)

Gigia! . . .

Titian and Aretino shall see her,
But not with gloating merely: they shall itch
With hot envy too.

BELLINI

You've sent for them?

(GIGIA hobbles in. She is much perturbed)

GIORGIO

(to her, unawaresly)

I'm in today to every gondola
That calls. Be at the outer gate and say so.

GIGIA

Yes, Messer Giorgio. (Pauses)

GIORGIO

Out and to it, then.

GIGIA

Before I speak?

GIORGIONE

Of what, toothlessly?

GIGIA

How can I tell you if I may not speak?

Though I've a tongue and lips as good as any.

(Crossing herself)

You will do well to hear.

GIORGIO

And that Church mummary

Will make me? . . . Well, speak . . .

GIGIA

The plague is here.

(Again crossing herself)

All the canals whisper fearfully

That it has broken out at last in Venice.

GIORGIO

(with horror, in spite of himself)

Master, I had a dream of it last night;

A vision of some evil that was stained

With terror and with prescience of more.

I woke stifled and saw the hurried dead

Floating upon the sea and air around me,

Their faces fixed as if by the injection

Of some embalming terror.

BELLINI

Then, my son,

It was a premonition—and one meant

To warn you against venting your wounded pride

Upon Isotta thus . . . Destroy the picture,

Scatter its nakedness upon the wind,

And vow never again to paint another,

Though that would break my heart. For if you do not—

(A ribald VOICE at the outer gate interrupts)

THE VOICE

(ARETINO'S)

Who's in? . . . Are you there, Messer Giorgio?

(Knocks)

Where is the humpish hag that keeps your door?

(Louder)

May devils smear her image over hell

In fifty bawdy postures if she—

GIORGIO

. . . Stay!

Hold off, Aretino . . . if it is you!

ARETINO

Ardent delight of ladies' eyes, it is,

And Titian with me! Shall we lift a stave,

A loud and long and lusty one to prove it?

(Sings)

A wench I had and an olive tree,

But where, now, where is she?

Gone with a gosling over the sea,

Over the sea—ee—ee!

What shall I do to comfort me?

Hey hi! ho! hee!

I'll take another upon me knee,

To comfort me—ee—ee!

(He breaks off laughing, then)

But here's your old Gigia, at last!

(Enters with TITIAN)

We come, Giorgio, at your sacred bidding,

Like satyrs to the piping of Adonis!

(Doffing his cap)

Greetings to you!

TITIAN

(Respectfully) And more to Messer Bellini.

I hope he does well.

ARETINO

Aie, the maestro!

The other glorious dauber of Madonnas.

(Stopping to sniff)

But bah! the smell of melancholy's here,

A stench of sighs and tears! . . . Can it be

A distillation, Giorgio, of the tales

Concerning little Isotta, who, they say,

Has left you? If it is, man, I'll swear

You've your deserts! Too many daughters of Eve

Have pursed their lips up, ready for your essay,

Or pinched with longing for you.

TITIAN

(laughing)

Or with envy,

As mine have been, Giorgio, more than once.

For I confess—

GIORGIO

You need not, Titian.

For I have sworn an oath that that never again*

Shall any woman—

ARETINO

(Keenly) What, man? cozen you?

With cuddling and cossetting? . . . Oh-ho!

(Hilariously)

By all the lusty gods of paint and passion,

Has wanton falseness in one little wench

Of all the world impelled you to foreswear

All peeping under pretty petticoats?—

(Enviously)

The truth is, Giorgio, that your Isotta

Had charms too many for one to satisfy!

And yet, to choose this Luzzi,

This swaddling acolyte of innocence,

For her new light-'o-love! to single him,

When for a whiff she might have had my arms

To nestle in . . . ! . . . Oh Titian . . . !

BELLINI

(angrily)

Aretino!

GIORGIO

Nay, let him speak, master, as he will.
When all is lost, defense of it is useless.

ARETINO

Then, Giorgio, by my beard, that's yet unborn,
I'll vow that your deserting Amorosa
Deceived me too! For had I not believed
Her chaster in your arms, wed or wanting to,
Than any convent jade, I would have lured her
Away from you—if honeyed lies could do it.
For an elysium like her warm round body
I never hope to look on!

BELLINI

Lecherous man!

ARETINO

As Messer Bellini at *his* age would be,
Even he, had he like Giorgio
First glimpsed her Aphrodite loveliness!

BELLINI

May Heaven—! . . .

ARETINO

I, for such a glimpse of it,
Would gladly rape virginity's last door!

GIORGIO

(going to picture)

Then you shall have it, Aretino, now.

BELLINI

My son—!

GIORGIO

Yes, though I die for it, of shame.

TITIAN

(amazed)

Of shame? . . . Die, for showing . . .?

GIORGIO

Betwixt you, Titian,

And me there has been less than friendly love;
For, pardon, if I say that you sometimes
Have loathed my triumphs.

TITIAN

That is true, Giorgio;

But with the brush I yet shall equal them.

GIORGIO

You shall surpass them, for my last is done.

TITIAN

Come, do you jest?

GIORGIONE

Done! And all whose tongues

Are busy about the streets now with laughter
And slander and innuendo shall look on it.

You've coveted Isotta with your eyes;

Now you shall have her—as shall all the world.

(From the picture, to which he has gone, he jerks
the cover. As they look at it ISOTTA enters very
pale. When she grasps the scene she stops, as if
mortally stricken)

BELLINI

(after a pause)

Isotta, are you ill? . . . Where have you been?
What has befallen you? . . . Oh would my breath
Had never lasted to this evil hour!

(To GIORGIO)

I'll go and fetch the leach, if one is near.

(He hurries out grievedly)

TITIAN

(more than abashed)

Will you excuse us, Giorgio? We are expected
At the Pisanis' . . . Aretino, come.

(They leave)

ISOTTA

(sinking to the couch)

The flesh of women is their fate forever
My poor, poor body, all I had to give
So desecrated!

GIORGIO

Why have you come here?

ISOTTA

(strained)

I think it was to see Messer Giorgione
Again—Messer Giorgione once so gentle
And honorable to women who are weak;
To hear Messer Giorgione, from whose lips
My heart has learned whatever bliss it knew;
To heal Messer Giorgione of the hurt
Of leaving him, if so indeed I might,
And then, in peace, to die.

GIORGIONE

Rather to kill!

ISOTTA

Why, that may be perhaps. The love I've had
Has lived, it seems, too long.

GIORGIONE

The love of a wanton?

ISOTTA

Who sees her body given nakedly
To lustful eyes, yet lives? It should be killed;
For surely—

GIORGIO

Lies! . . . Only deceiving lies!
 You've sought me again, knowing that I am cursed
 With craving and a helpless love of you,
 Because this lisping Luzzi whom you fled with
 Has wearied of your white-fleshed falsity
 And cast you off!

ISOTTA

(gently) Kind Luzzi!

GIORGIO

And blind to you?

And unaware now that you are here
 Where you unrobed to my adoring eyes?
 And thinking only that you wait for him,
 As once for me, with sweet expectancy?
 Or that your luring body is stirred only
 With ecstasy for him?

ISOTTA

He is . . . but Luzzi.

GIORGIONE

And I but Giorgione, another trifle
 Or toy to string about your sterile beauty?
 A bagatelle whose glory you can boast of?
 (Beside himself)
 Back to your Luzzi then! and may Venus,
 Goddess of black adulteries, not love,
 Be with you! May your blood, that I believed
 Vestal to all but me, run with passion
 As vile as any nymph's! May your body,
 Sacredly painted here, be to all time
 An image of soul-cheating chastity!
 (Sinking down by her suddenly)
 Oh I am lost . . . lost . . . forevermore.

ISOTTA

(summoning the words)
 No. I have come for saving, Giorgione.

(Her tone strangely alarming)
 But there is little time left to us now,
 For . . . Night is coming.

GIORGIO

(looking up) . . . Night? . . .

ISOTTA

The still Night,
 With death's dark gondola to waft me over.
 (As he rises)
 No, stay, stay! . . . there is no help—now;
 For it must be. A Voice beyond has said it.
 But ere I drift out on the darkening tide—

GIORGIONE

(down by her again)
 Isotta!—

ISOTTA

Peace must come to you as well.

GIORGIO

None can, now, or ever. My heart is dead.

ISOTTA

Then it shall rise again. For oh, beloved,
 My only and too dear one, could you believe
 That any unchastity ever could touch
 This body, which has been holy to you?

GIORGIO

But Luzzi—?

ISOTTA

It is true that I deceived you,
 True that I went away from you and wed
 Another—

GIORGIO

. . . Wed? . . .

ISOTTA

And yet it was not Luzzi,

As you, who have so often told the tears
Of the Magdalen on saintly walls, should know.

GIORGIO

Then who?

ISOTTA

(devoutly) One, Giorgio . . . who for long
Had whispered what at last I had to hear,
That sin had seized me, sin with you to whom
I had given body and soul unboundedly,
And whom I had revelled with in nightly bliss
Over the starred lagoons . . . We laughed, Giorgio,
You and I, as happy as nymphs and fauns
You told me of, laughed and danced and sang
Until the lute was like a thing that lived.
And clasped and kissed, Giorgio,
Until I knew that but one thing was left
To save us from our sin—one alone—
And that one thing, Giorgio, was but
To wed me—with vows and veil—to Christ!
(Clasps her crucifix)

GIORGIO

(stunned)

The Convent—?

ISOTTA

I am Christ's! . . . I fled to Him.
The gray cloistered walls of Santa Cecilia
Opened to me and folded me within them,
Santa Cecilia of the Bleeding Heart.
And Luzzi kindly led me to their door,
That you might be misled from following.—
And there I meant, with many pleas and prayers
And penances, to seek oblivion of you.
But illness fell upon me, this strange illness.
I could not die until you, shriven too . . .

GIORGIO

Isotta, that was the reason? the other was only
A blind bitter delusion?

ISOTTA

(with relief) Peace will come
To both of us at last now, please—

GIORGIO

(kneeling) No, no;
For me there will be none, for ever, Isotta,
Because I doubted your white purity!
(A bit wildly, rising)
And yet no wrong is wholly irreparable,
And you must live, or angels too should die,
Live and be freed of vows so vainly breathed!
Then wedded we shall again win delight.
For I am still Giorgio, and the sin
We revelled in shall be painted away
With holy pictures!

ISOTTA

(mystically) Only the dead are holy,
Or they who die, though living, to the world.
And you forget that eyes have looked upon me,
Hot eyes that would forever sear with shame.
Farewell, the tide will cool me . . . the lone wave
That washes in from Lido to my grave.

GIORGIO

No, no . . . ! . . . No! . . .

ISOTTA

(driftingly) The tide . . . the Night! . . .

GIORGIO

(again kneeling) Oh stay! . . .

ISOTTA

The gondola . . . it comes . . . (As if to an unseen presence)
Row on . . . row on!
(She dies. He gazes at her, dazed with agony)

GIGIA

(entering)

I've come to tell you, Messer Giorgio—

(Seeing ISOTTA, goes, lifts her hand, then drops it)

The plague! . . . Do not touch her again, Master!

Leave her at once, before it is too late.

(Herself stumbles out, shaking with terror)

GIORGIO

(as in a trance)

Can it be so, beloved, can it be . . . ?

(Hungriely, fatalistically)

This kiss alone, then, of all the kisses

That I have slain you with will God forgive.

(Presses his lips to hers, then again and again)

THE END

GIBRALTAR ROCK, AT NIGHT

The sun has set over Spain and the lights of Gibraltar
 Drive golden piles deep into the dark of the water
 Where wavering they are lost. The vast Rock
 Rises behind, an ebon immensity
 Mutely aloof; and phantom ships that serve it
 Slip in and out silently
 Past harbour lights that softly signal
 The shadowy coasts of Africa.

There is no granite fortress fiercely impregnable,
 Whose huge strength for a hundred years
 Has shaken the heart of the world's navies
 And given mankind a synonym of might.
 It is a soothing apparition of peace,
 Afloat between two continents;
 A memory of some earthless emanation
 That Beauty has made immortal—and then forgot.

PRINCIP

(Assassin of the Archduke Ferdinand)

(1914)

Look at him there, a lad of nineteen years,
Slipping along the street with Slavic tread:
A moment, and from out his pistol's mouth
Shall leap the spark to set a world in flames.
For with the red death of a royal duke
The infinite tangle of a continent
Of immemorally warring peoples
Is kindled, and through millions of calm breasts
The old race hatred runs. Austria reft,
Knowing the shot was at her feudal heart,
Flashes from out her molten indignation
A word that wakes the wild Caucasian urgency
Of Slavdom, ever swelling toward the West.
And Evolution's endless tragedies—
The friction fostered by uncounted kings,
The ancient war-cries that ring still in the blood
With timeless memories of rape and slaughter,
Inheritances, bred deep in the bone,
Of battling tongues and creeds and cruelties,
Of ruined homes, wrecked loves, and razed delights,
These and a thousand scorns and dark contempts
And hatreds, heirlooms of long ignorance,
Flare up into one frenzied thirst for war!

Princip, Princip, lad of the nineteen years,
Was it the finger of God that pulled your trigger
And loosed the avalanches of destruction
With a blind bullet of predestination?
Was it of God, who found His upward way
To some world-aim thwarted by all the mesh
And fever of impenetrable passions?
A hundred times within one haunted week
The scales of Destiny hung even:
Who weighed them down to War? Was it our God?
Who spoke into the Teuton veins a faith

That the inexorable hour had rung
To face the Russian horror, and, at last,
By letting their own blood, relieve their hearts
Of the long warward strain that pride and fear
And pent world-hunger kept so peril-taut?
Who used the living enmity of France,
Bidding her stretch an oath of dark allegiance
Across Germanic borders to the Slav,
And plight a fearful or revengeful troth
To the wild Muscovite, in whose vast breast
A consciousness, perchance, of low estate
Is the dim whip that drives him west to freedom?
And England, with her greed, for good or ill
Girdled about the globe, and with her pride
And dominance of empire thundering
From ships on every sea, who flung *her* heart,
A-quest for peace, yet with a secret sense
That now her dreaded foe might be struck down—
Who flung *her* heart upon the bloody fields?
Princip, with nineteen years, can you not tell?
Is God in this? or was His Immanence
O'erwhelmed by atavistic Nature's surge
Up from the core of earth? Are East and West,
From Asia to young Yukon, swept by winds
Of war into this crucible of time,
To emerge after long fumes of pain and horror
More nearly fused to one humanity?
Or has void Chance, on which was builded up
The Babel of our boasted civilization,
Betrayed us as we grasped toward the stars?
Can He, the Alchemist of the Universe,
Pour blood and burning tears and misery
And waste and famine out upon the earth,
Yet in a year, or in a yoke of years,
Transmute them into human betterment?
Or does intemperable fatality
Strain now the heart-strings of a continent
To breaking, and its mind to mad unfaith?
Princip, God's tool, or Hell's, can you not tell?

'Autocracies shall go and Armaments
And that peace-murdering trade, Diplomacy!'
Such the cry is, Princip. And shall your blow,
Your petty, obsessed, patriotistic blow,
The last of the innumerable that ages
Have struck against the ancient iron gates
Of Tyranny—shall yours avail at last?
Or shall steel yet entrench the happiness
Of nations, not far mightier common-weal?
And since men seize at last, with wan clairvoyance,
The vision of a World-State shaping dim
Upon the horizon of their misery,
Is it mirage, desert delusion, dream,
Born not of possibility but pain?
Or does in truth the misty dome arise,
Already shadowed forth by their desire,
Of a World-Parliament's protecting peace,
And in it the one universal right
Of HUMAN WELFARE graven high, to guide
Their vast deliberations—and to link
At last with brave and noble assent to Law
The nations bruted now by bloody Might?
Princip, with nineteen years, can you not tell?

From WRAITHS OF DESTINY
(A PHANTASY)

I

THE FORESEERS

(June, 1914)

SCENE: A chamber—or the vast apparition of a chamber—extending under the whole of Europe—whose outlines, country by country, are spectrally visible on its over-arching cavity. What appears to be light pervades it; and it is thronged with the phantoms of all who have ever died for humanity. The eyes of these phantoms are turned anxiously to the rear, where a rock-like incline seems to lead up toward earth, and where there is a mysterious tripod on which is enthroned Life, the pythia

of the Immanent God, swept through by innumerable forces. Around her are her ministers, Heredity—preternaturally human; Chance—awed from perpetual oscillation between good and evil; and Death, darkly incarnate. Premonition and awe seem to dominate all alike, in spite of their different natures, and Heredity is speaking.

HEREDITY

Let there be answer, O Immortal One,
To me your lawful minister!

CHANCE

(starting) Or me!
Lawless in all things!

DEATH

(slowly) Or to dreaded me!
(The throng sways)

HEREDITY

For ages I have woven as you willed,
Meshing the hearts of the vast myriads,
Who peopled all this continent above us,
With peace and hope and hate and greed and love.
And many were the evils of my task
Of threading the generations to your thought,
But still I toiled, trusting the fair intent
Of all your deeds would dawn for humankind,
Yet now—

CHANCE

Now—

DEATH

Now—

HEREDITY

Shall this thing be?

(The throng quivers)

CHANCE

(still immovable)

Say, shall it be? this horror that now looms
So wide that even I, the all-unheeding,

Who bring to millions fortune, millions fate,—
That *I* faint to know?

DEATH

(hollowly) And I—who minister
And master for you when none other can?
Yet who am now astounded: *Shall it be?*
(Life gives no answer)

HEREDITY

(drawing nearer)
Still you are tongueless and your emanations
Float on as ever to unwitting earth!
And yet I ask again shall all the warp
And woof of yearning ages be undone?
All the great dream of progress that has clothed
The nakedness of bestiality
In man, your highest creature? All the hope
Of human brotherhood, the one divine
And sacred vision none shall ever mar,
Save with remorse, through the arrestless years?
Speak!

DEATH

Yea, for I am due again on earth,
Where I must whisper it among the nations.
Shall there be Peace—or War?

THE THRONG

(with a vast murmur) Peace? or this War?
(Life sits as before)

HEREDITY

(with disquiet that is now unendurable)
Break silence, O Unfathomable One!
Before I cry you heedless—either of good
Or ill; and serve no longer—minister
No more to your immitigable mind.

CHANCE

And I! For worse than my wild-striking ways
Is this void apathetic voicelessness.

DEATH

(rising strangely) And I! . . . Yet stay! stay! I
scent at last
Some intimation, mute, impalpable,
Coming from whence I know not, that the hour
Of revelation is at hand. . . . Yet where?
(The throng is shaken)

CHANCE

Yea, where? . . . where?

HEREDITY

O Life, at last speak! where?

LIFE

(whose lips for the first time open)
Ye importuners! seekers to foreknowledge
Of this most treasonable tragedy
That ever has befallen to earth's years,
Hush and look up, for the To-Be begins.
And, lo, its passion which shall stain all things
Sweeps even now above our haunted heads.
They look: a shadow is sweeping Austria and Serbia)
Now are ye answered?

CHANCE

(in terror) Yea!

DEATH

(starting) War! . . . It is War!
(A shot rings down through the vastness)
And I must up—to ride the battlefields!
(The shadow turns crimson)

LIFE

Ai, go! For I who am the maker of men
No longer am their master—as oft-times

I've seemed. But Devastation, like a ghoul
 Of the Universe, will glut now with despair
 And grief and murder and all misery
 Its mystic and illimitable maw.

O man, wild thorn within the flesh of God!

(As her words die out, Death is speeding away toward earth. Then
 the chamber, grown dim, suddenly melts in phantasmal darkness.
 After which there is nothingness)

II

THE AVENGERS

SCENE: A road in Belgium, desolate as only night, destruction, and the cruelty of men can make it. Three unearthly forms seem gathered together on it—the ghosts of a Belgian child who has starved, of a French woman who was raped, and of a slain German soldier. They are hand in hand and have paused helplessly, as if so recently dead as to be uncertain of their state. Beyond them are impalpably felt the ruins of a church, a windmill, and a house or two. Farther down the road an unreal light seems to shine from some door or window.

The Child is whimpering. The Woman peers anxiously. The Soldier looks hopelessly on the ground. All are like shapes in a dream.

THE CHILD

My mother—did my mother starve too?
 I want her! . . . Is this Heaven?

THE SOLDIER

No, little one,

I do not think so; for it seems so dark.
 And yet I do not know; perhaps it is.

THE WOMAN

It is not. We are lost. Or it may be
 There are so many dead, the gates that lead
 To the other world are thronged and we must wait.
 Or it may be that God—if still He cares—
 Has yet some earth-aim for us.

THE SOLDIER

It may be. . . .

So many things may be. And yet it seems
That the aims of God are too like those of men.
My Emperor avowed it was God's will
That I should leave my wife and little children
To take up arms and kill.

THE WOMAN

Yes, kill and ravish,

Until we kill ourselves—as I have done.

THE SOLDIER

No, no; not that. I had a wife I loved.

THE CHILD

(again whimpering) My mother loved me. Is it
far to Heaven?

Why did God let me starve?

THE SOLDIER

(shudders)

Hush, little one.

THE CHILD

But why?

THE WOMAN

For this: to feed the German Emperor,
Who might have starved for glory had you eaten.

THE SOLDIER

Ah, that is terrible. Do not say that.
We are dead now, and truth alone is left.

THE CHILD

I did not want to starve. Why did God let me?

THE SOLDIER

We must go on. Perhaps we shall find out.
That light may lead us to the gate we seek
Out of the world: for surely one is near.

THE WOMAN

I think we are kept here for some avenging.

THE SOLDIER

Must even the dead avenge? God should not ask me
To kill again! I cannot!

THE WOMAN

Come: let's on.

(Leads)

THE CHILD

I could walk better if I did not hunger.

Will there be bread in Heaven? plenty of bread?

(A Shape in the gloom before them stays the answer. It is that of
a German Sentinel. They halt helplessly)

THE SOLDIER

(who shrinks) We cannot pass. We have no countersign.

THE WOMAN

The dead need none. See, he is unaware.

To him we are invisible and soundless.

We can be known, I think, only by those

For whom we are kept here. Come.

THE CHILD

(as they pass)

I am afraid.

Will any take our bread from us in Heaven?

THE SOLDIER

No, little one. Ah! . . . (sees the Sentinel and stops)

It is my brother, Gustav.

He is with the Emperor—in the Emperor's guard.

THE WOMAN

That light, then, is within the Emperor's quarters.

And now—at last!—I seem to understand.

(The scene darkens as she speaks, and then is slowly transformed.

It becomes a dim-lit room in which is the Emperor. He sits at a

table but, starting, cries out as the Three appear spectral before him; cries, and his sword falls clanging. An Officer enters)

THE OFFICER

You called me, sire?

THE EMPEROR

(still staring) No, no. I did not call.
(The Three have faded)

THE OFFICER

(surprised) Then, sire, good-night again.

THE EMPEROR

Good-night . . . good-night.

(With more terror, however, when the Officer has retired)

Am I distempered still? I thought I saw them.

Will the Almighty never ease my eyes
With angels or archangels? but send ever
These dead, with their undying misery?
Is He not with me, His divinely chosen,
With me to give my armies victory?

(Then, trembling, as the Three again appear)

Once more you come? Begone. What do you seek?

(They gaze at him)

THE WOMAN

You raped me, sire.

THE EMPEROR

(hoarsely) Not you nor any. Away!

THE WOMAN

You raped me—and raped France.

THE EMPEROR

Lies! it is lies!

(Half strangles)

THE SOLDIER

No, sire; but truth. For I was made to do it,
I and my German comrades.

THE EMPEROR

Traitor! Traitor!

Your Fatherland was ringed by enemies.

(Tries to rise)

THE CHILD

(to the Woman)
And let me starve.

That is the man who took away my bread,

THE EMPEROR

No! it was War that did it!

Take her away!

THE WOMAN

Yes, sire; but there will come

Others and yet others who are dying,

And who are dead, on every hour of the night—

Starved and ravished, murdered and slaughtered others.

For you shall never again look on the living

But there shall be about you, ever escapeless,

The pale, piteous, and accusing presence

Of the unnumbered dead. . . .

THE EMPEROR

Help! Help!

(He has swooned—his head falling forward upon the table)

THE WOMAN

Now we can find the gate out of the world.

(They pass slowly through the walls again hand in hand. The Scene darkens and once more becomes the desolate road—with only the wind now sighing along the waste)

III

THE UNBORN

SCENE: The place of the unborn, in a part of the earth from which the Immanent God seems for the moment strangely withdrawn. Its palpable vastness, through which time scarcely flows, is thronged by the shapes of unborn souls who know that at birth they must lose these shapes and take

on humanity. Apparitions they are, yet not altogether so. For the prescience of life, which alone gives them being, is upon them: a prescience now mingled with awe and terror. For swaying and clinging to each other they are looking off into an unfathomable Darkness through which thousands of phantom forms of the newly dead are drifting. And this drift of ghosts at times becomes denser as the wounded and shattered and starved from earth's battlefields glide pallid by.

The unborn are at last unable to endure the sight in silence. A pale shuddering surges over them, and their leaders begin variously to speak.

THE FIRST

Myriads!

THE SECOND

Slain and starven!

THE THIRD

Slain and frozen!

And drifting out of life—to which we go!
Drifting there, on the dark winds of death
Whose void is deeper than the Universe.

(The throng crouch from the sight, hiding their faces)
It should not be. It is too horrible.

THE SECOND

Birth into bitterness—then death and drifting!
This womb, that is before the womb, is better,
Though here we know but pallor and premonition.
Have we sought life that we should suffer it?
God should not send us to it.

THE THIRD

(to all) He should spare us.

(They lift a great moan)

Yes, spare us birth—that leads only to death.
So shall we, who are humanity-to-be,
Shall we, oh souls unborn, not dare to tell Him?

(They look up, gazing at him and at themselves. Then at length groups grasp his words and arise crying:)

SOME

Yes, we will tell Him!

OTHERS

He shall pity us!

Humanity should vanish—it is inhuman,
A deathward stream of cruelty and woe.

YET OTHERS

(Suddenly aware of His absence, with terror)

We cannot tell Him. He has forsaken us.

His Immanence is as a wind that was.

(In dismay and confusion they flutter—then turn to First Leader:
for he alone has heard all, undistraught)

SOME

Where is He? where?

OTHERS

Tell us! Is it for ever?

FIRST LEADER

(not answering until they are calmer)

He has withdrawn a little while to earth.

SECOND LEADER

(bitterly)

To drive these drifting millions so to death?

(The slain surge by)

THE FIRST

You speak so, thinking life is pain alone,
Nor see how in these faces swept and swirled

Innumerable there is an ecstasy

As of immortal dreams; a hushless hope,

A beauty of great daring and enduring.

Is there not some transcendence then of life,

Some anodyne that makes its agony

Dearer than our dim void of impotence?

(They are moved: but another vast gust of the dead undoes them)

MANY

No, no, life is despair. From the beginning
 The unborn have shrunk from birth, and to the end
 They will shrink.

MANY OTHERS

And that Darkness is for ever!

The dead but drift the deeper into it.
 Let us rebel and ask extinction now!

SECOND LEADER

Yes, let us rebel! let us rebel!

(They surge around him)

For God's impenetrable aspiration
 May destine some to happy planes of beauty
 Above the beat of pain, but we are many
 Who bear ever the weary mortal weight
 Of the world's vain and universal woe.

CRIES

(from all sides) Where is He then? Where is He?

OTHERS

Where! for . . . Oh! . . .

(A thought has pierced them)

Perhaps He never was!

SECOND LEADER

(more wildly) So! It is so!

(Terror takes them)

He never was! There is no God! There is none!
 From birthlessness we are swept into birth,
 Where Chance alone invests humanity
 With duping spirit-tentacles to cling
 To life with—Chance alone! There is no God!
 (Fear, Hope, and Despair play over them)

SOME

What shall we do, then? what?

OTHERS

(frantically) Let us be free!
 Let us, eluding life, leap to the dead,
 Forth through the suicidal universe
 Of Darkness!

OTHERS

Free! free! Let us leap free!
 (They run in hosts to the brink of the Dark and leap into it—
 heedlessly upon each other, in wide disarray. But vainly, for a
 wave of it wafts them back to their place)

THE FIRST LEADER

(when strewn and spent they lie there wailing)
 Ignorant is your deed and unavailing.
 Never shall any reach in coward ways
 To mastery—or to end—of his existence.
 And lo, the prescient moment of our birth
 Is trembling out of eternity—is here.

(The Immanent has filled the place again as he speaks—and the
 invisible winds of birth begin to blow. The unborn are swept to
 earth, and from there, as they vanish, the weak birth-whimper of a
 child is wafted back)

CITIES

(1933)

I

LONDON

With a shawl of fog thrown over her shoulders
 London waits in the rain
 For the next bus, the next train from Waterloo,
 The next ship from Thames-mouth, the next word
 Of an empire falling from her:
 Waits like an old woman, poverty-shaken,
 Remembering her youth, in the rain.

II

BERLIN

How shall the great destroyer save herself
From being destroyed?
They have torn her clothes away, broken her limbs,
Starved her body; her breasts no longer give.
Down Sieges Allee or Unter den Linden she roves,
Leading her children in search of food—her eyes torches
Of shame, misery, revolution, despair.

IV

ROME

Raped of decadent power
By a strong chief of the Black Shirts
Who swept like a Goth down on her
From Tuscan hills,
She gives herself to toil
And glory in his house,
And again feels self-healing
Flow like Tiber through her.
Yet ever, as of old,
Hears, from high St. Peter's,
The sacred rage of a *rival* despot thunder.

V

MOSCOW

High cheek-boned and bloody
With proletarian hate,
She stalks in rage to her Kremlin
And rings its recreant bells
Fiercely against all nations.
Hunger shrivels her body
And Godlessness her soul,
But ever an iron vision
Drives her on to the goal
Of the very Christ she curses.

VI

TOKIO

The mad dogs of war
Have bitten her and she runs
With rabies through the East,—
Her peaceful moat forgotten,
Her willows hung with poems,
Her honor among the nations,
And Buddha forsaken
And left with empty bowl
To beg from door to door.

VII

NEW YORK

A young Amazon
Towering over all cities
With beautiful strength,
Showing herself to ships coming in from the sea.
Half born of America,
Half of alien lands
That fate her to be the harlot of civilization
Or proud mother of new and mighty tomorrows.

COLONEL LINDBERG

(A week before he resigned)

Tear the wings from his shoulders;
He has brought them to shame.
The wings of his heart have shrivelled
In a Nazi flame.
Tear the wings from his shoulders,
The wings of command,
And let him wear his medal
From a tyrant land.

Tear the wings from his shoulders,
Nor mention again his name
Among the eagle fliers

Whose fight is for more than fame.
Tear the wings from his shoulders,
And bow with regret
He was once our youth and glory.
Now let us forget.

CRISIS

(1941-1942)

I

Has life no seer, who, with enthralled throat
Swept by the fusing fire of inspiration,
Can sound humanity's sore-needed note,
And with a Word weld nation to nation
In a great Dream of Unity so strong
That all the wild strangling nightmare throng
Of War's myriad inhumanities,
Too often bred of a misbegotten peace,
Shall never again enslave us with their wrong?

Or if no single voice is mighty enough
To say the Word—since Christ has pled in vain—
Will not the nations, travailing in pain
Toward the birth of a new age that calls,
Themselves grave the commandments that will break
The bitter barriers each is forced to make
In fear—only to find that it has willed
Its own destruction by distrustful walls?

II

Surely upon the firmament we face
A new world-healing Gospel must be graven,
And the first tenet of it should efface
Fear's evil, by an inexorable ban
Upon the severance of any race
From nurture-rights at earth's impartial breast,
Or from being impent in a soul-space
Too narrow for its higher needs or quest.

Surely it must—in letters above the reach
Of any erosive evil or decay!
Else even Faith itself, wasted away,
Will be dissolved in the menstruum of change,
Till doubting we are ordained ever to range
The evolving centuries intrepidly
We merely stand sterily asking *Why*:
Or *Whether*, since like flies we breed upon
A planet so indifferent to our birth,
Each should consider more than his own worth,
Or fight for more than he must keep or die.

III

With so much to be gained, by the engravure,
We cannot let Time, fazed and profligate,
Forever weakly die intestate thus,
Leaving no will dividing his domain
Among us to secure our future peace,
But only disputing continents accursed
With sick confusion, each fearing the worst
And finding it—without hope of release
From dark blood-brother greeds and enmities.
We cannot let such boundless bondage be,
Unless we are too doltish to be free!

For life has in it a Power that does not want
This cruel chaos we have wallowed in—
A Power we must believe while disbelieving,
One that will never cease sternly to haunt
Our hearts toward growths higher than our conceiving.
One we can never escape by any weaving
Of sophistry or selfish sloth alone,
Since it is flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone.

And despots who would deny or change this law
Of mystic growth in us rise but to fall;
Not one will ever have the might to awe
Us long into believing we must crawl
Unbuoyed by any divine aid at all.

For the strong urge to grasp a dream and grow
Is the one Providence we cannot doubt;
That from the ooze has lifted us, far out
Of our primeval past, and that, we know,
Will lift us still toward the ultimate hour
Of Victory—when need to call aloud
For a fierce irrepealable decree
To lay War sheathed forever in a shroud
Shall never again darken us with its woe.

THE GREAT WAGER

If need be, God of the living universe,
Withdraw your Spirit a little while from moulding
The nebulae of Orion, or from herding
The million clusters of the Milky Way,
And send its strength into our planet-mote
To help destroy the Evil Powers threatening
Whatever of beauty and truth, hope and freedom,
Has been infused into us through the ages.
Let vast Aldebaran fare alone for a little,
Or even fixed Polaris slip its mooring
And wander, if you must, to assure us
That not we alone seek to evolve
A world less wasteful of our blood and tears.
The supreme hour has come to make clear
Whether our oath that tyranny shall not prevail,
Tooth and claw, is your oath as well—
So clear that, after the victory we vow,
None shall ever again be left to doubt
That you are the Great Ally we march and suffer with.
The stakes are humanity's for the first time,
Not those of a single nation. The wager on you,
As the wheel of fate spins inscrutably,
Is all our hard-won hope and faith in the future.
And even though the battle should be lost,
Our trust in you need not be, if thenceforth
We can be sure you were ardently in it.
But if we cannot, we shall still question

As futilely and confusedly as before,
Whether we have not merely built temples
To an invisible God who is no God,
Or who with greater needs in greater worlds
To reckon with, has no reserves to send us—
Or who, perhaps, has no desire to send them.
And were that so, we should utterly raze
All shrines to all deities our dreams
Deludedly endow with existence
And rear one to human strength alone;
Or boldly assert that we intend instead
To plant jungles of hate and tyranny
From which to spring and ravage, as our foes do:
Confessing thus, in final disillusion,
That beauty, goodness, and truth are lamps kindled
By our hands alone upon this planet,
Not by the spreading radiance of your Spirit
Immortally resurgent through all Being.
Therefore if time is not an addled egg,
Whose only certain yield is corruption,
Let it now hatch at last and reveal
That you indeed are the Providence within it.
Break the shell, in a way to show surely
That not we alone, and without reason,
Are fighting the strange battle of right and wrong
In a universe spawning both unwittingly,
And so cannot alone lay claim to the victory
When it has come, as come it must and shall.
For no faith in ourselves is finally faith
That is not faith in a universe whose aims
Are those of an immanent Life, Mind, and Spirit.
And no doubt is so lonely as a belief
In one unpityingly devoid of them.
Break the shell—though not inconceivably
With a miracle of impossible Omnipotence
Disruptive of all faith in all order,
But only, in the accustomed way of Nature,
With such releasing flashes of inspiration
As through the centuries have come to clear

The lenses of our thought and imagination
 Of the myopic mists that prevent us
 From seeing there is no road to victory
 Which does not lead as well to final defeat,
 Unless it is one you open and tread with us.

AFTER THE SYMPHONY

The last finale had crashed,
 A surging shower of iridescent vibrance;
 And as the musicians sighed and rose
 To drift away into the night,
 Their tired instruments, glinting no longer,
 Catching no longer enchanted rhythms
 Into their breasts of wood and brass,
 Were laid away in case and cover,
 Hushed.

The violins slept;
 With rhythm dreams flitting along their fibres.
 The flute with an aria lingering yet at its vents,
 Like a disembodied soul at earthly haunts,
 Lay still;
 And still lay the clarinet and sad oboe
 In the leathern dark that swathed them.
 Then I heard speaking,
 Started, I think, by a viola:
 'How much Beethoven has said in his Fifth!
 Had he but told us a little more
 The meaning of all life's haunting Minors
 Would surely be open to us!'
 A piccolo sighed, 'Perhaps.'
 To which a cello mourned reply,
 No; you forget Tchaikowsky!
 Chords cannot plumb the ultimate meaning of sorrow.
 The "Pathetique" is proof that grief and wrong
 Are discord-atoms, element-powers,
 That enter all being darkly.
 Resolve them away, we may,
 Ever into the Major,

But ever, as mists to moors, they return
Blindly, to brew their bane.
Meanings are but illusions that vanish,
Mysteries only abide!

'Then,' said a blunt bass-viol,
'Illusions are better, though briefer!
Bach, with his bounding clarity for me!
The strong crisp creed of a fugue,
Free of all doubtings, achings, searchings,
Sure at last of completion!'

'And of immortality too?' asked the oboe,
With reedy quaver.
'Would indeed it were so!
Would we could round life off
To a circle of completion!'

'But since we cannot,' rang a horn,
'For wishes are not wonders,
Why do we whine of meaning and mystery?
What do these matter? *Power* is all!
Strength to shout to the heavens
That we are masters of them
As long as we breathe of earth.
For Death and the dead are equals—both are dead!'

From the drums a volley echoed, 'Both are dead!'
Whereon was hushing, but not ceasing;
No more peace or ceasing
Than follows the rattle of clods on a coffin.
For all waited the word of their leader, the violin,
Whose voice is ever reverberant
Of the hope and despair of the world.

And softly it began . . .
As if the thronging memories
Of a thousand symphonies stirred it:
Of allegros that ran like youth

Before slow-aging adagios;
Of scherzos that dissolved in the arms
Of funeral strains, to be borne away
On the solemn hearse of silence:
Softly it began . . .
'We play but ill, comrades,
And blind to the score's beauty,
Else neither meaning nor mystery
Would overmuch trouble us.
Great joy can only come to the griever,
Great grief to the rejoicer.
So only they who are resonant
With both, and who sound harmonies
That waken harmonics infinite,
Only they play well!
Be the clef what it may then,
Be the time brave or broken,
There is a rhythm always
Of mingled Major and Minor
For those with souls to seize it!'

An interval followed
Of silvery murmured assent:
Not even the blare-begetting horn broke it.
Then slow sleep muted all to oblivion.

MEMORABILIA

A million years ago and men were not,
A million years will go and perhaps we
 shall not be;
But I am glad to have seen Sanibel Light
Flash from under the dark silver arc of
 the sea
To the sands I walked one night from
 Little Marco Pass.

Nobody else will remember that night
 maybe,

For there are many sands in the world
 and many seas
And many lights and much darkness. . . .
But if there is any memory for men
In the days beyond death—down the uni-
 verse
Where the star-sands sift anew through
 the sieve of time—
The bent beam of Sanibel Light will still
 strike
From under the horizon into my heart,
Sword upon sword of soft beauty piercing
 me,
As on the night I walked alone by the sea's
 edge.



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